



NEWS RELEASE

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ORANGE COUNTY WATER DISTRICT STAFF RECEIVE TOP HONORS FROM WATEREUSE CALIFORNIA

FOUNTAIN VALLEY, Calif. (September 30, 2021) — During its annual conference and awards ceremony, WateReuse California recognized two Orange County Water District (OCWD; the District) staff members with awards that reflect exceptional leadership in advancing water recycling in California. General Manager Michael (Mike) R. Markus, P.E., D.WRE, BCEE, F.ASCE received the President’s Award and Principal Engineer Benjamin (Ben) Smith, P.E. received the Recycled Water Staff Person of the Year Award.

“Thank you to WateReuse California for recognizing our incredible staff for their leadership in advancing water reuse initiatives,” said OCWD President Steve Sheldon. “We are proud to have a general manager like Mike lead the District’s professional staff in developing innovative water reuse programs, such as the world-renowned Groundwater Replenishment System, and congratulate him on receiving this honor.”

During his 33-year career at the District, Mike was responsible for managing the implementation of the Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS) program, which first began operating in 2008. It is undergoing its final expansion which will be able to treat 100 percent of the region’s wastewater, produce 130 million gallons a day of pure drinking water, and serve one million people daily when it is complete in 2023.

Mike’s expertise and dedication to recycled water programs is reflected in the many achievements the [GWRS](#) has attained over the years, including being known as the world’s largest advanced water purification system for indirect potable reuse and pioneering reverse osmosis technology for water reuse. Additionally, Mike remains committed to serving in leadership capacities for many industry organizations where he shares information, insights, and best practices with agencies across the globe. Currently, Mike serves on the board of directors of the Water Research Foundation, the National Water Research Institute, American Water Works Association, and the California Section of the WateReuse Association.

Under Mike’s leadership, OCWD also manages the [Green Acres Project \(GAP\)](#), which became the nation’s first landscape irrigation wastewater treatment plant when it became operational in 1991. GAP is a water reuse program that provides recycled water for landscape irrigation at parks, schools, and golf courses; industrial uses, such as carpet dyeing; toilet flushing; and

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power generation cooling – much of which is overseen by OCWD Principal Engineer Ben Smith, who supports the GAP program from operations, service and repairs, end-users, rules and regulations, accounting, and more.

“Congratulations to Ben for being recognized as Recycled Water Staff Person of the Year. I appreciate Ben’s hard work and perseverance in supporting the District’s recycled water programs,” added Sheldon.

Projects like GWRS and GAP ensure a local, reliable water supply for the 2.5 million people the District serves. To learn more about OCWD and its recycled water programs, please visit the [District’s website](#).

About Orange County Water District

The Orange County Water District is committed to enhancing Orange County’s groundwater quality and reliability in an environmentally friendly and economical manner. The following cities rely on the groundwater basin, managed by OCWD, to provide 77% of their water demands: Anaheim, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Irvine, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Newport Beach, Orange, Placentia, Santa Ana, Seal Beach, Stanton, Tustin, Villa Park, Westminster, and Yorba Linda. For more information about OCWD, please visit www.ocwd.com, like @OCWaterDistrict on Facebook, follow @OCWDWaterNews on Twitter, follow @OCWD on Instagram, and follow Orange County Water District on LinkedIn.

About WateReuse California

The mission of WateReuse California is to promote responsible stewardship of California’s water resources by maximizing the safe, practical and beneficial use of recycled water and by supporting the efforts of the of WateReuse Association. For more information, please visit the [WateReuse California website](#).

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