



Calimesa resident Denise Gastel wins the landscaping contest.

### Denise Gastel wins the 2021 fire-resistant landscaping competition

Calimesa homeowner Denise Gastel has won the Fire-Resistant Landscaping Competition hosted by South Mesa Water Company. Her attractive, well-designed, and water-wise garden ranked the highest for the presence of fire-resistant plants, strategically placed pathways and rock, called "defensible space" and overall aesthetics. Competition judges included the South Mesa Board of Directors and Battalion Chief Tim O'Connell from the Calimesa Fire Department.

The water company hosted this competition to help equip the community with knowledge on how to strengthen their own homes' resilience before fire season and in light of drought conditions. "Water conservation is key to getting through the drought and you're making long-lasting, sustained change. On behalf of the Calimesa Fire Department, we thank you for your efforts in making your homes drought-tolerant and fire-resilient," said Battalion Chief O'Connell.

South Mesa recognized Gastel as the competition winner on Wednesday, Oct. 13, and she received a \$200 gift certificate to Cherry Valley Nursery and a special congratulations and certificate of recognition from State Senator Rosilice Ochoa Bogh and Assemblymember Chad Mayes.

Denise and Michael Gastel bought their house in 2009

when the landscape was just dirt, rock, and weeds. With the help of their daughter Jonnie, the Gastels transformed the landscape to embody the beauty of the desert.

"Michael would get ideas and start drawing up designs and we'd head to Beaumont Cherry Valley Nursery and Jurupa Nursery to shop for plants and rock together," said Gastel. The fire-resistant landscape runs on a drip irrigation system with a few rotating nozzles. The landscape features a big desert willow off to the side of the house, common and rare succulents, ocotillo, and a night-blooming cactus which is known fondly to the Gastel family as the "mystery cactus."

Follow in the Gastels lead and reduce your vulnerability to fire by incorporating more fire-resistant plants and creating defensible space. Additional safety measures include removing debris like dead leaves that act as fuel and making sure you have a hose that can reach all areas of your property.

To view the finalists' landscapes, visit online at SouthMesaWaterCompany.com/2021-contest/.

SMWC is a not-for-profit water company founded in 1912 that serves about 3,000 households in portions of Yucaipa and Calimesa. The company's shares are owned by the residents that SMWC serves and the governing board members.

## YVWD reports statewide conservation efforts

By MICHELLE LOPEZ  
Staff Reporter

On Oct. 5, the Yucaipa Valley Water District (YVWD), General Manager Joe Zoba reported that the California State Water Resources Control Board and the Department of Water Resources released information that in July the state reduced water usage by 1.8% as compared to Gov. Gavin Newsom requested conservation target of 15%.

"We have been tracking the drought and back in June of this year, Gov. Newsom asked for a voluntary 15% reduction in the amount of water that is used throughout the state. In response to that, the district adopted a resolution setting forth our state's declaration which gets us to that 15%," Zoba said.

It is important to recognize that agencies like the YVWD have developed a recycled water system that achieves a 15% drinking water conservation goal each year and not only during drought periods. These large community infrastructure investments are often overlooked when a single, simplified statewide water conservation goal is communicated to the public. It is increasingly difficult to generate additional water conservation savings from communities that are already maximizing their overall efficiency and effectiveness each year as is the YVWD.

For the YVWD water resource portfolio and water resource percentage for 2021, conservation for groundwater is 56.6%, a number that is up by 54.2% as reported in 2020; Oak Glen surface water is at 1.4%, up from 1.3% in 2020; Imported water is 25.6%, down from 27.4% in 2020, and recycled water is at 16.5%, down from 17.0% in 2020.

The report noted that Southern California has been largely unaffected by the drought due to massive recycled

water programs, multiple water sources and a greatly reduced water usage level from 10 years ago.

"This year and year-to-date 2021 we are already at 16.5% recycled water use. Going back to 2015, we have been able to offset our total demand by 15% each and every year and year after year by the use of our recycled water program. That's in addition to the 10% decrease we have received just on the drinking water use," Zoba said.

Zoba said that just recently the San Francisco Gate newspaper did a good job of summarizing that and ran a story that explained that Southern California has a more diversified supply of water therefore Southern California ends up as being not as impacted by droughts as Northern California, where it has a lot more dependence on rainfall, lakes and streams.

"There are starting to be some good articles written up now on this diversified portfolio and how you are better able to withstand some of the droughts that are occurring with the climatic changes and things like that," Zoba said.

"Some regions may see state water allocations slashed by even more than the 5% cut this year. Next year's cuts may also affect settlement contractors and those whose claims to water predate the reservoir system in California, as well as steep cuts to the State Water Project, which may allocate no water to some of the 27 million people and 750,000 acres of



YVWD have developed a recycled water system that achieves a 15% drinking water conservation goal each year and not only during drought periods.

Photo courtesy of Metrocreative

farmland connected to the project," stated in the Director Memorandum dated Sept. 22 by Evan Symon.

The Director of the State Department of Water Resources Karla Nemeth said, "The challenge is there is no water. We're planning for the worst, but we are hoping for something better...We are starting with record low reservoir shortage...We're going to need all Californians to conserve and conserve a lot more."

"Despite the dire situation in the Northern part of the state, Southern California is being asked to reduce usage which is almost akin to a punishment for something it didn't do," said Symon.

Hydrologist Dr. Craig Kirk said, "All of Southern California has been working out the right and wrong ways to go about their water supplies for over a century...They're ok for quite some time. It's just the Northern part of the state refusing to diversify, refusing to put desalination plants up, refusing to connect to other sources and just relying on reservoirs, that is screwing things up. And the whole state is punished now for their mismanagement."

The public can view a detailed report at yvwd.dst.ca.us.

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