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Water conservation efforts recognized with awards

By Monica DeVera

With California in its third consecutive year of drought and a state emergency calling for a 20 percent reduction in water use, water conservation has never been more important, say members of the Silicon Valley Water Conservation Awards Coalition.

So, in conjunction with World Water Day, the panel, an assembly of 10 Peninsula organizations, recently recognized a varied group of people, agencies and businesses for understanding the importance of developing cutting-edge efforts to conserve water.

"Water is a resource we undervalue and overuse," said Kara LaPierre of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network, a member of the awards coalition. "These awards are an important way to recognize the individuals and organizations that are making a difference in consumption today."

Those making a difference were honored for reducing large percentages of water annually, creating programs that provide financial incentives for conservation, sponsoring state bills to reduce urban and agricultural water use, and other innovations.

Montara Water & Sanitary District won the award for the small government agency/utility category for reducing the community's already low per capita water use to just 69 gallons per day — pretty good considering the average person uses about 80 to 100 gallons per day or more, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

"We were excited," said Clemens Heldmaier, general manager at Montara Water & Sanitary

District. "The nice part is that it not only recognized that we've done something right, but the citizens who were a big part of this success."

"We are living in times where we can't always expect water to come out when we turn on the faucet," Heldmaier added. "A lot of problems are associated with water, and a lot of work goes into conserving water, so I'm proud that we can set an example."

The Silicon Valley Water Conservation Awards also acknowledged Redwood City's successful innovation in implementing a program that provides water budgets to their customers so the city can help them stay within their respective water budgets.

"Water is a precious resource, more precious than we know," said Redwood City Public Works Superintendent Justin Ezell. "We were truly honored because this award recognizes those responsible in leading the way toward reliable water solutions that really help our community."

Other award recipients included Applied Materials, California Native Society, the City of San Jose's Environmental Services Department, First Community Housing, former state Assemblyman John Laird, the Kirsch Center for Environmental Studies, Stanford University, and ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance.