

East Mersea welcomes water conservation program

By Bryan Jessop

A province-wide agency decided to 'wet' a local school's ambitions to conserve and protect one of the region's most valuable resources.

The Ontario Clean Water Agency's OneWater education and awareness program officially took its first step into Union Water Supply System territory in the spring of this year, as East Mersea Public School's Grade 7 students worked it into their 2017-'18 curriculum. On Thursday, June 21, OCWA operations manager Dale Dillen and operator Shantel Torres paid a visit to the Greater Essex County District School Board school, along with Leamington deputy mayor Hilda MacDonald — who is also the UWSS board of management chairperson — and UWSS general manager Rodney Bouchard, to present participating students with a plaque.

The gesture was made in recognition of the 20 students' involvement in the program, an Ontario-wide effort to expand and

strengthen the OCWA's ongoing commitment to water literacy. About two months earlier, the group worked the agency's message of clean water usage and conservation into its curriculum before Torres arrived for a three-period presentation on the UWSS facility in Ruthven and OneWater's methods of ensuring safe drinking water remains available across the province.

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— Pete Driedger



The 20 Grade 7 students of East Mersea Public School, along with teacher Pete Driedger and Ontario Clean Water Agency guests Shantel Torres and Dale Dillen, Union Water Supply System general manager Rodney Bouchard and Leamington deputy-mayor/UWSS joint board of management chairperson Hilda MacDonald reveal a plaque earned for the school for its involvement in the OCWA OneWater program. The initiative was presented to the school in April in an effort to spread awareness of water usage and conservation. (Southpoint Sun-Journal Photo)

During the presentation, Torres led a 'jar testing' experiment, allowing students to identify the differences between containers holding water samples with under-corrected, over-corrected and proper dosages of coagulant. The group also discussed where water comes from and conservation programs including "I Don't Flush..." The program, also presented during recent Essex Region Children's Water Festivals, illustrates what shouldn't be flushed down toilets or disposed of through drains, including pharmaceuticals, personal hygiene products, household hazardous wastes, fats, oils and greases.

"A lot of people just aren't aware," Torres said. "As an example, the new flushable baby wipes on the market now actually shouldn't be flushed. That's what OneWater is about — education and awareness."

Both Torres and Dillen explained that they'd like to see the OneWater program expand into other schools in regions serviced by the UWSS, which includes Leamington, Kings-

ville and parts of Essex and Lakeshore. Union Water is utilized by about 61,000 people throughout those four municipalities, reaching as far east as the Wheatley Townline, westward to the Arner Townline and northward to Highway 401.

"People are just starting to get familiar with it," Torres said of the OCWA's OneWater program. "As they become more aware, we'll be able to use it more often."

Pete Driedger, a teacher at East Mersea, described the program as a crucial learning experience for his students.

"It's important to get the message across that we don't really have that much drinking water available," he said. "That's why learning about conservation is so important."

In another gesture of appreciation, the participating East Mersea students were each given a water bottle on behalf of the OCWA, which manages water and wastewater facilities across Ontario.