WATER BAR 5:30 PM 10/6/17 S. KOCH

Faculty at UW-River Falls are using an innovative new art installation, called the “water bar,” to promote awareness of water quality issues and the value of water in general within the St. Croix (croy) River Watershed. Sophia Koch (cook) has the story.

MP3 RUNS: 100 O/C: STD

SOPHIA KOCH: DRINKING WATER GETS PLENTY OF ATTENTION WHEN IT’S SUDDENLY NOT AVAILABLE. PUERTO RICO IS IN THE NEWS AS IT STRUGGLES TO RESTORE CLEAN DRINKING WATER IN THE WAKE OF HURRICANE MARIA, AND OFFICIALS FROM FLINT, MICHIGAN, ARE STILL FACING LEGAL BACKLASH AFTER THE LEAD (LEHD) POISONING INCIDENT IN 2016. WHEN THERE’S NO CRISIS, HOWEVER, IT CAN BE EASY TO FORGET ABOUT WATER. THAT’S WHAT PROFESSOR GRETA GAARD (GARD) FROM THE UWRF SUSTAINABILITY FACULTY FELLOWS IS HOPING TO CHANGE WITH THE INTERACTIVE ART INSTALLATION CALLED THE “WATER BAR.”

GRETA GAARD: AND SO WATER BAR GIVES EACH CUSTOMER A FLIGHT OF THREE DIFFERENT SAMPLES OF WATER—AND PEOPLE ARE INVITED TO TASTE THE WATER, AND DESCRIBE HOW IT TASTES TO THEM, TO ACTUALLY PAY ATTENTION TO THE TASTE OF WATER, WHICH WE’VE SORT OF ASSUMED TASTES LIKE NOTHING.

SOPHIA KOCH: LEE OWEN HAS BEEN A RESIDENT OF RIVER FALLS FOR FORTY-FIVE YEARS, AND SHE VOICES CONCERNS ABOUT THE EFFECTS THAT URBAN EXPANSION WILL HAVE ON RIVER FALLS DRINKING WATER. SHE’S PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE EXCESSIVE AMOUNT OF FERTILIZER THAT HER NEIGHBORS SPRAY ON THEIR LAWNS.

LEE OWEN: EVERYBODY’S GOT THIS PERFECTION OF LAWN THING THAT’S BEEN ENCOURAGED WITH ADVERTISING, SO I THINK THEY OVERDO CHEMICALS ON THAT…

SOPHIA KOCH: HOWEVER, THE RIVER FALLS ANNUAL WATER QUALITY REPORT FOR 2016 SHOWS THAT THE MUNICIPAL WATER DRAWN FROM UNDERGROUND AQUIFERS IS RELATIVELY CLEAN. USING THE EXAMPLE OF NITRATES (NIE-TRATES), WHICH ARE USUALLY THE RESULT OF FERTILIZER RUNOFF AND WHICH ARE POTENTIALLY HARMFUL IN HIGH ENOUGH QUANTITIES, RIVER FALLS MUNICIPAL WATER TESTS AT BETWEEN ZERO-POINT-ZERO TWO AND ZERO-POINT-ZERO FIVE PARTS PER MILLION. THAT’S WELL BELOW THE TEN PARTS PER MILLION CUTOFF POINT AT WHICH IT’S CONSIDERED HARMFUL. FOR FALCON NEWS, I’M SOPHIA KOCH (COOK).

The water bar has been displayed in the past at sustainability-related events like the UWRF Chill on the Hill concert series and an art opening at the Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson. There will likely be another water bar display as part of the October Campus Sustainability Month.

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