

Water Then, Today and Always



By Lowell Johnson,
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of LPHA

In 1854 in the Soho District of London, England, the handle of the public Broad Street water pump was removed in an effort to prevent further spread of a severe outbreak of cholera. This outbreak is best known for physician John Snow's hypothesis that contaminated water, not air, spread cholera. Dr. Snow showed that the water company was taking water from sewage-polluted sections of the Thames river and delivering the water to homes with an increased incidence of cholera. Sound familiar?

Flash forward to today and compare headlines about the conditions in Flint, Michigan. Once again, city residents are sickened as a public water supply is found to be responsible for illness and exposure to known contaminants. Health officials and water utilities are called upon to assure that the exposure is stopped and that clean water is provided.

Clean, safe drinking water is critical to human health. Keeping our drinking water safe and plentiful depends on people in many sectors; including citizens, scientists, public water supply systems, and cities, counties, watersheds, state and federal government staff. Dr. John Snow's study is regarded as the founding event of the science of epidemiology. Epidemiology is central to public health practice. Public health continues to work with issues of water quality globally, nationally, statewide and in your community.

Local public health departments have a variety of roles related to safe drinking water. Twenty-five (25) local programs around the state have delegated authority to monitor and test "non-community" water supplies at places such as restaurants, resorts, and campgrounds that serve the public from private well water sources. Many other water sources that serve schools, offices, factories and child care facilities are also tested annually for coliform bacteria and nitrates, pesticides, solvents and metals. Many local programs offer water testing services for residents on private well water, or coordinate with other agencies that offer such services. The State Health Department works directly with municipal/public water suppliers to assure quality and sanitation.

Counties are also actively engaged in a variety of other pollution prevention efforts with the goal of preventing water contamination. Solid and hazardous waste management programs are developed to do this. Agencies that are concerned about non-point source pollution such as storm water runoff and other best practices are also intended to reduce water contamination. Whether we label these efforts as "public health" or whether they reside within our public health offices or not, they are public health strategies. We cannot have health without safe, clean water.

Many Minnesotans have long considered water to be an endless resource. We have some of the most pristine and beautiful waters in the world. We must, however, now recognize that these water resources are not infinite and are not as clean as we would like. We need to concern ourselves with both water quality and quantity. We need to recognize the critical connections between surface water, groundwater, drinking water and health.

The Local Public Health Association considers efforts to modernize Minnesota's aging drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and to protect groundwater from contamination to be important public health initiatives for our state's future. Water has been, is now, and always will be at the core of our community's health. ■

Freeborn County Student Receives Annual AMC Scholarship

Freeborn County Commissioner Christopher Shoff, Immediate Past President of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), selected Nicholas Christianson, a senior at Albert Lea High School, to receive a \$3000 AMC Student Scholarship during AMC's Legislative Conference in St. Paul on March 10.

Candidates for the scholarship must demonstrate excellence in the classroom, actively participate in intra- and/or extra-curricular activities and serve as a role model for his or her peers. The scholarship recipient must also share the AMC vision of a future that contains active civic participation, community pride and a sense of community responsibility. The scholarship is made possible through donations made during a silent auction at the association's annual conference each December.

Christianson currently has a 4.055 GPA with a class rank of 27 out of 218. He has lettered in both cross country and tennis, is a wonderful guitar player, and holds a purple belt in Tae Kwon Do.

"As the immediate past president of AMC one of the great things that I get to do is select an outstanding high school student from Freeborn County to receive the AMC Student Scholarship Award," Shoff said.

Shoff said that part of Christianson's application essay that really struck him was how he and his family volunteered following the 2010 Freeborn County tornadoes,

making hundreds of sandwiches for displaced families, workers, and volunteers who were helping those most devastated in their time of greatest need.

"I was also impressed that Nicholas' essay expressed his gratitude to his parents for working so hard to give him a good start in life and how he feels it is his duty to make the most of it," Shoff continued. ■



Nicholas Christianson, an Albert Lea High School senior, and Freeborn County Commissioner Christopher Shoff, who selected Christianson for the 2016 Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) Student Scholarship.



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