

Easthampton drinking water judged best in the U.S. at national conference



Easthampton Water Superintendent Tom Newton (center) seen receiving a first-place award for drinking water quality. (Facebook photo, National Rural Water Association)



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EASTHAMPTON — Easthampton's drinking water has been named the best in the nation.

The Easthampton Water Department on Feb. 11 won the gold medal for best-tasting water in the United States at the 2015 **National Rural Water Association Rally** in Washington, D.C., the association announced Wednesday.

It's the first year Easthampton has won the national honor, said Tom Newton, the city's longtime water superintendent. The winning water sample was sourced from the Nonotuck Park Well, which is so pure it can enter the distribution without treatment, Newton said. The water is sourced from the **Barnes Aquifer**.

Southampton, which also sources its water from the Barnes, **won first place in 2008**.

The **Great American Water Taste Test** is conducted by a panel of judges who evaluate water from 50 states for qualities of clarity, bouquet, and taste, according to the national association's website.

Shortly before Wednesday's competition, Easthampton's water sample was transported via FedEx to the nation's capital, where it was immediately placed on ice, said Newton.

"The judges used crystal-clear, sparkling wine glasses to conduct the tasting," he said.

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National Rural Water Association, which holds the event every year, is a non-profit that offers support to water professionals in America's small communities. The Massachusetts Rural Water Association is a member.

Newton said he and others met with members of Congress to discuss funding for infrastructure, training and other water-related issues in their districts.

"(U.S. Sen.) Elizabeth Warren was thrilled that we won," said Newton. "(U.S. Sen. Ed) Markey we saw in passing, but we got our message across. Being in Washington was quite an eye-opener."

Newton and his colleagues from the Bay State also met with U.S. Rep. Richard Neal and other Massachusetts lawmakers during the national conference.

Easthampton's water has not been without problems in the past.

In the 1980s, the Hendrick Street and Pines wells were found to contain Trichloroethylene, or TCE, a volatile organic compound, in amounts higher than that allowed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The water from those two wells is now treated using tower aeration technology, said Newton. Water is pumped to the top of a 36-foot-high tower and filtered through a special packing material. As the water falls, forced air is blown upward, breaking the water into microscopic particles and allowing the contaminants to be stripped away, Newton said.

Enough chlorine is then added to maintain a residual amount as the water moves through the system. The Easthampton Water Works does not add fluoride.

Easthampton rate payers pay \$2.70 per 100 cubic feet of water to support a water division budget of around \$3.8 million, a **rate set** by the Board of Public Works.

Each state association conducts a contest from among its members, and the 50 winners move on to the national event. This year Buhl, Idaho won the silver medal and Whittier, Alaska won bronze.

Newton said winning the national award was a great source of pride to him and his staffers at the city's water division and treatment plant located on Hendrick Street.

"I've been nearly 40 years in the water business, and I'm retiring soon," said Newton. "This feels like a nice cap on my career. Water is very important."

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