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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**August 6, 2020**

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**Otay Selects El Cajon Homeowner as Winner of the WaterSmart Landscape Contest**

*Not Only is Her Garden Beautiful, but is Also Wheelchair Accessible*

Spring Valley, CA – At its virtual Board of Directors meeting on Aug. 5, the Otay Water District Board recognized El Cajon resident Patricia Wood for taking the title of “Best in District” in the Otay Water District’s 2020 WaterSmart Landscape Contest. Her landscape demonstrates a well thought-out design, methods for efficient irrigation, and appropriate plant selection and maintenance.

Every year, multiple water agencies in San Diego County hold a contest in their service areas to identify and recognize residents who have worked hard to beautify their landscapes with water-saving designs. In Otay’s service area, Wood’s functional, easily maintained landscape serves as a great example of ways to achieve water-use efficiency outside the home or business.

For more than 10 years, Wood had been struggling with a high water-use lawn and gophers digging holes in her yard. Then in July 2018, she came across a flyer announcing the four-class series of the WaterSmart Landscape Makeover Program – presented by the San Diego County Water Authority and the Otay Water District. By taking this course, she was able to learn which low-water-use plants and design would work best for her new garden.

“The one thing that really inspired me was when they said to consider your front yard as another room in your home,” Wood said. “My daughter is in a wheelchair and spends most of her time in her bedroom or our family room, so giving her an outside room to enjoy was the best Christmas present for her that I could imagine.”

Wood is president of the Neurodegeneration with Brain Iron Accumulation (NBIA) Disorders Association — a small nonprofit dedicated to families affected by rare, genetic neurological disorders. She dreamed of one day surprising her daughter, who has NBIA, with a beautiful water-wise garden. Finally, with recommendations from the landscape makeover program and with help from a landscaper, Wood transformed 3,850 square feet of her yard and brought her design to life.

Her efforts have led her to decrease her estimated water use by an average of about 27 percent compared to the years before upgrading her landscape.

Her garden now features a decomposed granite path for her daughter to access areas from her wheelchair up close. It also includes a dry creek bed to capture the rain from the roof and prevent overrun. Various water-wise plants such as foxtail agave, blue chalk sticks, butterfly bush, cape plumbago, Texas sage, Texas sundrop, sea lavender, little ollie, and a gold medallion tree fill up the yard.

For irrigation, Wood replaced her overhead spray nozzles with a drip irrigation system that runs approximately twice a week for seven to 12 minutes, depending on the weather. A weather-based irrigation sensor automatically shuts off the controller when it rains and turns it back on when it is dry. She even solved the gopher problem by applying a wire mesh underneath the topsoil and a wire basket for each plant. According to Wood, her overall water bill was reduced by 30 to 40 percent.

“We are thankful to those residents in our service area who have made great strides to increase outdoor water-use efficiency by upgrading to WaterSmart landscapes,” said Otay General Manager Jose Martinez. “Our hope is that customers find our water-saving classes, resources, and incentives useful for creating their own landscaping projects.”

In 2018, Wood applied for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California’s Turf Replacement Program, and as a result, in 2019, she received an incentive of \$7,325 for her project. Wood recommends a WaterSmart landscape to others who are looking to save water and cost. She says that another plus side is that plants, trees, and flowers can bring relaxation and healing versus a big grassy lawn that demands too much water.

“It is so relaxing and stress-reducing to enjoy sitting outside and watching the birds and butterflies in our garden,” Wood said. “It has made staying at home much easier during the pandemic.”

As the contest winner, Wood was recognized at the District’s Board meeting with a certificate of recognition, gift certificate to a local nursery of her choice, winner’s yard sign, and other promotional items. To view photos of her landscape, visit [otaywater.gov](http://otaywater.gov). For more information on the contest, visit [landscapecontest.com](http://landscapecontest.com).

### **About the Otay Water District**

The Otay Water District is a public agency providing water, recycled water and sewer service to nearly 226,000 customers within approximately 125 square miles of southeastern San Diego County, including the communities of eastern Chula Vista, Bonita, Jamul, Spring Valley, Rancho San Diego, unincorporated areas of El Cajon and La Mesa, and eastern Otay Mesa along the international border with Mexico. For more information on the Otay Water District, visit [otaywater.gov](http://otaywater.gov).

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