



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Friends of the Chicago River salutes MWRD with Green Ribbon for transforming blue waters



*On hand to celebrate the Green Ribbon Award from Friends of the Chicago River were (from L to R): MWRD Vice President Barbara J. McGowan, Commissioner Timothy Bradford, Commissioner David J. Walsb, President Mariyana T. Spyropoulos, President of the Friends of the Chicago River Board of Directors Sally Fletcher, Friends of the Chicago River Executive Director Margaret Frisbie and Commissioner Kari K. Steele.*

For its latest innovations in improving water quality in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS), the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) took home the Green Ribbon Award at the Friends of the Chicago River's annual Big Fish Ball.

The Friends of the Chicago River honored the MWRD as part of the Chicago River Blue Awards Program for the MWRD's work bringing the Thornton Composite Reservoir and two new disinfection facilities into service all within the past year. The MWRD was one of nine award winners recognized at the Friends' Big Fish Ball, held on June 8 at the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers. The projects were honored for setting new standards for river sensitive developments and making vital contributions to the ongoing transformation of the Chicago River.

"I thank the Friends of the Chicago River for this honor and

the alliance we share with them in our pursuit of cleaner, natural waterways," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos, an honorary co-chair of the Big Fish Ball, who greeted the nearly 500 Big Fish Ball attendees with a speech. "By forging partnerships with organizations like the Friends we become stronger in advocating awareness for protecting this recreational and economic resource that connects our communities and unifies this region."

Within nine months, the MWRD opened two disinfection facilities and completed the world's largest combined stormwater reservoir, providing dramatic improvements in the CAWS. These pivotal projects added to the dialogue of public access to the CAWS and have led to a new mentality and appreciation for the waterways' potential for generations to come. The completed projects also contribute to the environmental and economic advantages that come with cleaner rivers.

"Friends was thrilled to award and recognize the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago for their work on these two significant projects," said Margaret Frisbie, Friends' executive director. "They are the most significant water quality improvements to happen in decades and make the river system healthier for people and for wildlife. The Chicago River Blue program is intended to educate, encourage, and reward projects that take people, wildlife, and clean water into account—these project meet those goals."

In July 2015, the MWRD introduced chlorination and dechlorination disinfection to its treatment process to reduce the amount of pathogenic bacteria in the water released from the Calumet Water Reclamation Plant (WRP) *(continued)*

## Friends of the Chicago River salutes MWRD *(continued)*

into the Calumet River system. The MWRD followed that ingenuity with more innovative disinfection technology at its O'Brien WRP in Skokie. By implementing an ultraviolet (UV) irradiation system to disinfect water entering the CAWS, the MWRD discovered how an altogether new strategy could produce clean water in limited confines of time, space and resources. The UV disinfection system is now the largest wastewater treatment UV installation in the world, having the potential to treat 450 million gallons of water per day.

The MWRD went a step further by accelerating the schedule for implementing disinfection to coordinate these water quality improvements with the opening of the Thornton Composite Reservoir. Located in the south suburbs of South Holland and Thornton, the reservoir maximizes the water quality impact for the Calumet River System. The 7.9-billion-gallon engineering marvel is the world's largest combined stormwater reservoir, benefitting 556,000 people in 14 communities throughout the South Side of Chicago and south suburbs. It also protects 182,000 homes, businesses and other facilities. The reservoir, tantamount to 12 Soldier Fields in size, is part of the MWRD's Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP), also known as the "Deep Tunnel," consisting of more than 100 miles of tunnels deep below the surface of the Chicago region and three reservoirs designed to capture and hold stormwater and sewage for treatment at water reclamation plants. The "Grand Canyon" of the south



*MWRD President Mariyana T. Spyropoulos, an honorary co-chair of the Big Fish Ball, gives remarks at the Friends of the Chicago River's annual Big Fish Ball at the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers, where the MWRD was also honored for its latest projects in river water quality improvements.*

suburbs serves not only as a gargantuan holding tank for stormwater to assist the MWRD in its battle against flooding, but it also protects local waterways by collecting combined sewer overflows (CSOs). These CSOs normally enter the CAWS or homeowners' basements after major rain events. Instead, the CSOs have a place to be held at in the reservoir before undergoing treatment at the Calumet WRP.

The Big Fish gala is a benefit for Friends of the Chicago River and serves as an occasion to celebrate the Chicago River system. Other award winners included: the United States Army Corps Engineers, which received a Blue Ribbon Award for the Horner Park Ecological Restoration on the North Side; the village of Glenview, which received a Silver Ribbon Award for the downtown Glenview Streambank Stabilization project in the north suburb; the Riverside Investment and Development, which received a Silver Ribbon Award for its new construction at 150 N. Riverside Plaza in the West Loop neighborhood; and Ross Barney Architects for their work on the Chicago Riverwalk Phase II project, which also received a silver ribbon. In addition to the MWRD, Green Ribbon awardees included Structured Development for its work on both New City and hydrology improvements at Big Marsh, the Chicago Botanic Garden and the Forest Preserves of Cook County for the Cal-Sag Trail, for which the MWRD dedicated half of the land on which the trail is built.

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### Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

*Established in 1889, the MWRD ([www.mwrld.org](http://www.mwrld.org)) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*