



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

PRESS RELEASE

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Juneteenth flag raising and celebration mark MWRD's commitment to freedom, achievement and racial equality



From L to R: MWRD Commissioners Dan Pogorzelski, Yumeka Brown, Mariyana Spyropoulos, Chairman of Finance Marcelino Garcia, President Kari K. Steele, Eira L. Corral Sepúlveda, Vice President Theresa Flynn and Cam Davis recognize Juneteenth with a flag raising outside the MWRD's Barbara J. McGowan Main Office Building.

Commemorating a newly observed holiday with meaning and reflection, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) raised the Juneteenth flag and marked the occasion with conversation and celebration.

MWRD Commissioners and staff raised the Juneteenth flag at all seven of its water reclamation plants as well as their headquarters at the Barbara J. McGowan Main Office Building, 100 E. Erie St. In the evening, the MWRD welcomed guests from the Diamano African Dancers and Drummers, performing artist Yaw Agyeman, PUSH Excel Youth Orators, performing artist, arts advocate and music educator Theoph-

ilus Reed, and Dr. Kim Dulaney, vice president of Education and Programs at the DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center.

Although the federal government did not observe Juneteenth as a national holiday until 2021, the MWRD two years prior offered the day as a paid optional holiday.

“We observe Juneteenth to celebrate freedom, achievement, and racial equality,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “We were not only one of the first agencies in the region to recognize Juneteenth as a holiday, but we also want to reflect

Juneteenth flag raising and celebration, *cont.*

on what it means and why we honor this day for our staff and the communities we serve to protect.”

Juneteenth is an important milestone in American history, as it commemorates the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. On June 19, 1865, Union Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, two months after Commanding General Ulysses S. Grant presided over the surrender at the Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia. He informed formerly enslaved African Americans that the Civil War had ended, and they had been granted freedom almost two years earlier, effective January 1, 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation was enacted.

“We commemorate this holiday, gather to understand its meaning, celebrate and continue building toward our goals

of equality,” said MWRD Commissioner Yumeka Brown. “In our work to ensure everyone has sufficient wastewater treatment, stormwater management and clean water, equity is a constant priority for the MWRD, and this holiday reminds us why this service is so important.”

The Juneteenth flag holds special meaning in its symbols. The star represents freedom for every Black American and pays homage to the lone star of Texas, where the last enslaved people were freed. The burst surrounding the star represents a new beginning for all, and the arc represents a new horizon of opportunities for Black Americans.

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrdd.org.

Juneteenth flag raising and celebration, *cont.*



Front row (L-R): MWRD Commissioner Yumeka Brown, Dr. Kim Dulaney, Rutherford Simmons, Nelson Simmons, President Steele, Theophilus Reed, Christianna Gray and Commissioner Daniel Pogorzelski. Back row (L-R) Executive Director Brian Perkovich, Vice President Patricia Theresa Flynn, Chairman of Finance Marcelino Garcia and Commissioner Eira L. Corral Sepúlveda.

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Juneteenth flag raising and celebration, *cont.*



The Juneteenth flag was raised simultaneously at all seven of the MWRD's water reclamation plants that are located in Cicero, Chicago, Des Plaines, Hanover Park, Lemont, Schaumburg and Skokie. The MWRD was one of the first government agencies in Chicago to raise the Juneteenth flag in 2021.

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Juneteenth flag raising and celebration, *cont.*



The MWRD welcomed guest speakers and performers for the Juneteenth Fireside Chat and Celebration of Freedom on June 15.

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