

## Village of Three Rivers Claims Best U.S. Water

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PALMER - Move over Poland Spring, here comes Three Rivers.

Three Rivers Fire District water, known by locals for its crisp and clean taste, has put the village on the map with the honor of best-tasting water in America.

The water washed away the competition at the eighth annual Great American Water Taste Test on Tuesday in a contest sponsored by the National Rural Water Association.

"Everyone told us the water always tasted good in Three Rivers," said Three Rivers Water Superintendent John L. Sasur Jr., who proudly showed off the award. "This a feather in the cap for the town of Palmer."

The win didn't seem to surprise many people. Three Rivers water has long had the reputation of being the best of the four villages.

"Everyone says, 'Yup, we knew it,'" Sasur said yesterday.

Sasur brought a sample from the new Pinocchio's restaurant on Bridge Street to Washington, D.C., for the competition featuring 42 other entrants. It was the first time the water was entered in the contest.

Inside Dominick's Restaurant on Three Rivers' Main Street, waitresses Carol Dalessio, 52, and Courtney M. Kusek, 17, serve their fair share of water.

"I think it's fantastic," said Dalessio, who also lives in Three Rivers. She said city water pales in comparison to Three Rivers water.

"A lot of people compliment it and say how nice the water is here," Kusek said. Taking a lunch break was Scott R. Sabourin, 30, who sipped the water and declared it "better than bottled" before he headed back to work at Sabo's Landscaping. Another customer, Carol A. Mirabile of Ware, said "It's fine ... I don't taste anything funny."

Police Department members also weighed in. "It's crisp and clean and refreshing. I do a lot of traveling and this is one of the best ones around as far as I'm concerned. There's no chemical taste," Police Chief Robert P. Frydryk said.

"I love our water," said Police Lt. John J. Janulewicz. "It makes you a great cup of coffee," said dispatcher Brian P. McNally.

Town Assessor Beverly A. Morin said the water is the first thing people miss when they leave Three Rivers. "There's no taste. It's just fresh, natural water," Morin said.

Three Rivers made the finals after it won a statewide contest for small Massachusetts systems in the fall. In that contest, water from Turners Falls was the runner-up. Springfield also has a reputation for good water; most of its water comes from the Cobble Mountain Reservoir in Blandford and Granville, and it has won taste competitions in the past.

Why is Three Rivers water so good? "You have to ask God," Sasur said. It may have something to do with the two wells that are fed by an underground aquifer near the Ware River. The water is filtered naturally through sand and gravel which "gives you the flavor you want in your water," Sasur said. "It's closer to mineral water than pure water," he said.

Three Rivers has 925 connections, and the district was established in 1912. It also serves south Belchertown and part of Thorndike. Sodium hydroxide, required by the federal government, is added because it acts as an anti-corrosion agent, he said.

Sasur said he even brought some water by U.S. Rep. Richard E. Neal's office. Neal's chief of staff, Ann M. Jablon, grew up in Three Rivers, drinking the now famous water. She said whenever her father Fred Brozek visits, he complains about the Washington, D.C., water and the "chlorine smell." She said the water sample from Sasur was a nice reminder of home, and that Neal, D-Springfield, now knows what the fuss is about. The win, Jablon said, "legitimizes what (my father) has been saying all along."

Kristina Cash, spokeswoman for the national association, called the win a "big deal." "It's an amazing thing to be able to claim the best-tasting water in America," Cash said.