How Many Straws Will It Take?
October 3, 2021

As a young teen in New Orleans, I participated in a social group that spent many times together socializing and exploring our fair city. We had limited allowance remaining at week's end and one of our favorite treats was a nearby special root beer vendor. We liked their frozen mugs of root beer. Our problem was that we seldom had enough for individual orders, so we pooled our change and ordered one "super mug." It came with "as many straws as you need." We learned early on that beyond eight straws drawing root beer at the same time, it was a losing effort. When we tried to squeeze in others, it just didn't work and all of us were left wanting.

That early life lesson keeps coming to mind as I ponder the circumstances of the pace of growth in our area and the demands on the aquifer that supports us for essential water. The frequency with which the meteorologists and newscasters call attention to how our Edwards Aquifer "drops" rapidly nags at my worry that we may discover how many "takes" are too many!

As one who lived where surface water from the "mighty" Mississippi River provided us with our water needs, the aquifer source for our waters here fascinated and thrilled me. Instead of a very involved process of "settling" debris from the river's water, filtration and then "purification" before sending it forth into the community we have natural processes here capturing our water. However, instead of the remarkable flow of the river from my early years, I am mindful and concerned that more and more folks here are partaking of the waters beneath us. When you consider the multiplication of individual wells, larger community and subdivision installations and note the water towers and storage systems that are being added all about us here in Comal County, it's cause to pause and begin some calculation.

The Edwards Aquifer in our area has the neighboring Trinity Aquifer, particularly in western Comal County. Both are "holey limestone" aquifers (karst aquifers) highly sensitive to both pollution and depletion. Then San Antonio reaches northeast to the mostly sand Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer with a 142-milelong straw called the Vista Ridge pipeline to supplement their future needs. With other water-suppliers in the area negotiating to pipe in additional water it now sounds like there may be more straws than the aquifers can support if all these supplementary measures are implemented.

It is time for oversight for the benefit of all when it comes to our water sources. The static notion that the water beneath each acre somehow is there just for the dwelling on that acre ignores reality and the dynamic regional nature of the flow and spread of aquifers and what they provide. Further, in a state where so many citizens benefit from subsurface waters, including the springs they put forth, it would seem time to take a long look and do an assessment of water sources, both surface and subsurface, viewing and regulating them as one.

That, friends, takes me back to the "supersize" mug which we youngsters decided could only provide satisfying root beer for a limited number of straws. Whatever we call the wells and water systems growing up around us like wild mushrooms, we might want to think through our finite source of this essential resource!

Mark your calendar for 9 November at 6 p.m. when Dr. George Veni, world-famous karst hydrologist, aquifer pioneer and adventurer will be CCCA's guest. Check for details at www.comalconservation.org.

Submitted in loving memory and appreciation of Jensie Madden, co-founder and friend of CCCA.