

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Mojave Water Agency annual essay contest scholarship winners announced**

Apple Valley, CA — Apple Valley, CA – Oak Hills High School Senior Mollie Zielke has earned the top spot in this year’s Mojave Water Agency (MWA) annual high school essay contest.

This year’s theme, “Filling the Water Workforce Reservoir,” challenged students to address the pressing workforce crisis in the water industry and propose innovative strategies to attract the next generation of water professionals.

Out of 54 exceptional entries, three finalists were chosen for their insightful and solution-oriented essays. Each finalist worked with a community mentor to refine their written submission into a compelling public presentation that was delivered before a live audience of family, friends, and a panel of independent judges.

As the first-place winner, Mollie earned a \$3,000 scholarship and will reprise her presentation at the Agency’s Innovators High Desert Water Summit on Feb. 7 in Victorville. This signature event is free and open to junior and high school students in the MWA service area.

Amber Rudolph, a junior at University Preparatory School, earned a \$1,000 scholarship for her second-place contribution; and a third-place scholarship of \$1,000 went to University Preparatory School senior April Medina.

“With a wave of retirements and declining awareness about water-related careers, the need to replenish the workforce is more urgent than ever,” said Mojave Water Agency Board President Dr. Kimberly Cox. “Students were tasked with analyzing factors such as demographic shifts, misconceptions about water infrastructure jobs, and the loss of institutional knowledge. Their impressive essays proposed actionable solutions, including offering competitive wages, creating career advancement pathways, and improving workplace conditions to attract and retain new talent.”



*Mollie Zielke, 2024 MWA  
Essay Contest Winner*

The finalists were judged by a panel of the region's top professional communicators including Shannon Dunkle, Public Relations Specialist for the Town of Apple Valley; Sue Jones, Public Information Officer for the City of Victorville; and David Wylie, Safety & Communications Officer for the Victor Valley Wastewater Reclamation Authority.

Each finalist benefited from mentorship to polish their ideas and hone their public speaking skills, culminating in impactful presentations on finals night held in the MWA boardroom Nov. 14. This year's mentors included - Jisela Corona-Gonzalez, Public Information Officer at the Lewis Center for Educational Research and Academy of Academic Excellence; Tisha Lopez, Marketing Specialist at Victor Valley Transit Authority; and Irene Molinar, Director of Marketing at Tomorrow's Talent.

"The passion and creativity shown by these young leaders give us hope for the future of the water industry," said Dr. Cox. "This contest is about more than just essays; it's about sparking interest in vital careers and inspiring the next generation to take up the mantle of safeguarding our most precious resource."

For more information about the Mojave Water Agency and its educational initiatives, visit [www.mojavewater.org](http://www.mojavewater.org) or call (760) 946-7000. To register for the Water Summit, visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VH78RY2>.

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