



WORDS TO LIVE BY

Think globally, act locally has been bandied about for years, but at the Okanagan Sustainability Institute (OSI), it is a guiding mantra.

Under the leadership of director Professor Keith Culver, the OSI has a mandate to make the Okanagan as environmentally and socially sustainable as possible.

From his office at UBC's Okanagan campus, Culver and colleagues are busy forming partnerships with campus researchers and surrounding communities.

"Our initial focus is on water, urbanization and rurality and their interaction," says Culver, who took over as the OSI director in July 2011.

It is no secret the Okanagan is a great place to live, and as more people move to the region to take advantage of the amenities, it places a strain on vital resources such as water.

"We may be one of the first places in Canada to see water availability as a restriction to urban growth," says Culver.

Culver is forming partnerships with municipalities and the private sector. He sees the research underway at UBC's Okanagan campus as making a difference in the entire region.

One such partnership with the master-planned community New Monaco could have an impact in any part of the world with a similar climate.

Imagine a lawn that stays green no matter how hot and dry it gets with only a minimal amount of water. UBC researchers are not only imagining it, they are working towards the low-water lawn and New Monaco is providing the testing area.

Should the key to a waterless lawn be found, regions around the world with similar climates will likely take notice and want the drought-resistant lawn seed.

Community partners are also collaborating with researchers looking into using waste construction material for green roofs, or as fill for concrete. More materials that can be reused means less waste going into the landfill.

And it is not just Kelowna that benefits from the efforts of the university. Several OSI researchers will be presenting snapshots of their research to the City of Penticton Climate Action Committee, the first of many visits to community partners.

The OSI, in collaboration with Facilities Management and the Okanagan Sustainability Office, will host a green roof seminar and tour this fall. Up to 75 members of the Urban Development Institute and public will visit both operational and experimental green roofs on campus. They will hear from researchers and campus operations experts regarding the potential benefits of green roofs.

Culver envisions the Valley coming together as a single social and environmentally sustainable society.

"The OSI is dedicated to recognizing every discipline has a contribution to make," says Culver. "The community is very excited to have a world-class university campus in the Valley and we have an unparalleled opportunity to treat the Valley – from Armstrong to Osoyoos – as a living laboratory for social and scientific sustainability research. We have willing partners helping us."

Connecting the various private and public sector groups and agencies are Culver and the members of the Okanagan Sustainability Institute.

"I only want to help the membership of the institute go where they want to go," he says. "I have been up and down this valley to meet with public and private sectors to learn more about their sustainability needs." ●