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## NORTHWEST ARKANSAS TIMES

### Sewer plant deemed 'work of art' at opening

BY MARSHA L. MELNICHAK Northwest Arkansas Times

Posted on Friday, August 29, 2008

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BROOKE McNEELY Northwest Arkansas Times Bruce Shackleford, with Environmental Consulting Operations Inc., left, talks with local residents Thursday as he gives a tour of the prairie and wetland area around Fayetteville's West Side Wastewater Treatment Plant on Broyles Road. The city celebrated the completion of the plant with a grand opening Thursday.

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It took 40 miles of pipes on 3 acres, 32,000 yards of poured concrete and a lot of relationship building, not to mention \$ 63 million, to transform cow pasture and weeds into Fayetteville's new West Side Wastewater Treatment Plant.



"For the folks, the citizens of Fayetteville, and all the citizens we serve, this is an excellent, a super day," said David Jurgens, water and wastewater director, as he greeted his audience of about 150 at the grand opening Thursday.

Joining him in what once would have been unlikely praise for the new plant were representatives of the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission.

That group took Fayetteville through the court system to the United States Supreme Court over earlier plans for treating Fayetteville's sewage and releasing it into the Illinois River.

At Thursday's event, the scenic rivers commission representatives seemed as excited, if not more so, than Jurgens.

Commission Chairman Gerald Hilsher described the plant as a shining example of a truly collaborative effort.

Ed Fite, administrator for the scenic rivers commission, didn't stop there. He jumped up and hugged Fayetteville Mayor Dan Coody as Coody began his remarks.

"Mayor, you are just, you rock," said Fite, who said later he's not usually a hugging kind of guy.

Wastewater from Fayetteville's West Side Wastewater Treatment Plant flows through and out of the new plant into Goose Creek, which flows into the Illinois River into Oklahoma, then into the Arkansas River and back into Arkansas.

"You just had to have been around in the 1980 s when the sparring was going on between the state of Oklahoma, the state of Arkansas and the city of Fayetteville over the wastewater treatment facility that was proposed back then," Fite said to explain his enthusiasm and support for the new plant and the teamwork that led to it.

"I always thought we wouldn't want to pollute the Illinois River any more than we would anybody else polluting our Buffalo River," said Coody, who was one of several speakers who talked about the relationshipbuilding that began with a breakfast meeting in Siloam Springs with congressmen, engineers, and representatives of poultry companies and departments of environmental quality and soil and water from both Arkansas and Oklahoma.

"This go'round we had enough people involved that we were able to talk through many of the issues, and we never got to a big argument over any of this," Fite said.

"What that did was pay dividends. We came up with a solution that no one could fight about," he said.

"This project is a work of art," Coody said, referring to the buildings and construction of the new plant.

He said it functions perfectly and that it has met stringent effluent standards since day one.

"I know a lot of folks are upset at the fact that the early estimates, back in 2000 or in 1998, whenever the estimates were made, didn't match the prices that we saw escalate in the mid-2000 s," Coody said.

He went on to say that the citizens of Fayetteville knew the project was needed and stepped up to help fund the plant.

Coody said without the new wastewater plant the city would have faced a moratorium to prevent new businesses or new schools from being built.

For Steve Rust, president and CEO of Fayetteville Economic Development Council, the new sewer plant makes economic sense.

"If you're promoting your city, it's economics 101," Rust said. "If your toilets don't flush, you don't get a chance to talk about your opera."

Coody said that in addition to sewer problems potentially stopping growth, the city had 100 overflows a year in sewer lines that fed into Beaver Lake, the city's source of drinking water.

He said if the new plant hadn't been built, the city would have faced \$ 10, 000 a day in fines from the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality.

"We're finished. It works great," said Coody.

ADEQ Director Teresa Marks said she and her staff were very impressed with Fayetteville's new plant.

Hilsher thanked Coody, the City Council, the citizens and taxpayers for making the new plant happen.

He said Coody understood the need to devise a plan that worked for everyone and Oklahomans understood there was a critical need to get a new wastewater treatment site because of the growth in the area.

"The proof is in what it's putting out. This half part per million of phosphorous is exactly where we hoped we would get, and we've gotten there," said Hilsher.

Jurgens asked his audience, "How often does a \$ 60-million government project open early ?".

Jurgens said the June ribbon-cutting was a way to announce that water was flowing through the plant but that construction was still ongoing. Thursday's grand opening was about the completion of the plant.

Like Coody and Hilsher, Jurgens talked about the team effort and the thousands of people who made the new plant possible.

Jurgens said that 10 other projects had to come in on time or early so the treatment plant could. Jurgens also reported that 22 contracts are still underway or not yet closed for overall wastewater system improvements.

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