

Matheny Tract connects to Tulare water system

By Luis Hernandez

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Reyna Palma lifted her left hand triumphantly as she helped turn the underground valve that brought water from Tulare's system to Matheny Tract Tuesday morning.

Moments later, after a few others have had a turn opening the valve, Palma said she was happy clean water was making its way to the 300-plus homes at the south-of-Tulare tract.

"It has been seven years of fighting," she said. "I am very happy because we are getting clean water."

For years, Matheny Tract residents dealt with water with arsenic levels too high for consumption. After some legal wrangling, state officials ordered a water system consolidation to connect the tract to Tulare.

"We are thrilled this work ensures Matheny Tract residents will exercise their human rights to safe, drinking water," said Ashley Werner, a Fresno-based attorney for the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability.

Werner represented Matheny Tract residents in the legal matters.

Reyna said her advocacy for clean water is about health.

"I have always said it's important for the children to have clean water," she said. "And for senior citizens. I am among them."

West Valley Construction Foreman Bill Brewer said 338 water meters were installed. On average, 15 water meters were put in daily since work started in March.

"This is a pretty good size project," he said. "We are happy with it. This is what we do."

With the meters installed, the older system was to be discontinued. West Valley Construction Project Manager Shad Eastham said two well sites will be abandoned. The pumps will be pulled out and the tanks removed.

Tulare councilman Craig Vejvoda, while making opening remarks, said Tuesday was a historic day. He also said several agencies, state, county and local, worked together to bring the project about.

"We are here to celebrate the cooperation and work that make this happened," he said.

With the connection turned on, Matheny Tract residents became Tulare city customers. The residents' bill will be based on the tier system used. They will also be subject to Stage 3 ordinance for water conservation and scheduling.

Tulare Public Works Director Joe Carlini he expects Matheny Tract residents to be good customers.

"They'll be good water stewards," he said.

Carlini said he expects water use to be significant in the first month or so.

“This is the first time they will be able to use it for drinking and cooking,” he said.

Already, Tulare water system administrators have estimated the additional water needed and the system is expected to hold up.

“We will have a better handle on the scale later. We have 350 new connections. We will go from there,” he said. “I don’t see any issues with the system.”

Project Manager Eastman said all water

Self-Help Enterprises participated in the project by helping apply for funds needed for system installation. In addition, Self-Help representatives have kept contact with Matheny Tract residents about what to expect with the new system, said Jessi Snyder, Self-Help Enterprises community development specialist.

Snyder had simple advice for Matheny Tract users: “Use water carefully.”

Snyder said Self-Help Enterprises will continue working with Matheny Tract residents on other infrastructure projects such as a sewer system, street lighting and sidewalks.