

Farmersville makes rewarding connection with rural neighbors

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Public Works in a small town is something we all take for granted. When you turn on the faucet you expect water to come out. When you turn down a street you expect potholes to be filled. Yet, no one ever congratulates these civil servants when they not only do what is expected with limited resources but go above and beyond to find solutions to severe problems.

That was the case in Farmersville where the City was recently awarded one of the first Public Works Project of the Year Award for Small Cities/Rural Communities by the American Public Works Association (APWA). Farmersville received the award during the Annual Meeting and Awards Banquet for the Central California Chapter of APWA on Nov. 5 at The Double Tree hotel in Fresno. The small cities award was created in 2013 for agencies serving a population of 75,000 or less.

Farmersville received the award for its quick work in solving the water crisis in the neighboring community of Cameron Creek Colony. In 2013, residents of the unincorporated community started to notice their wells were failing due to the combination of shallow groundwater and the deepening drought.

Luckily, the City of Farmersville was already working on a plan to connect the more than 100 homes to the City services to provide clean drinking water and sanitary sewer and storm drain facilities even before the effects of the drought were apparent. Two years prior to the well failures, Farmersville received a grant to develop a Preliminary Engineering Analysis (PEA) to address the needs of Cameron Creek, which was designated as a Severely Disadvantaged Community.

In less than two years, the City was able to obtain \$1 million in emergency funding through two separate state and federal agencies, design the project, install 7,262 lineal feet of 8 inch water main, six fire hydrants, 10 control valves and connect 106 Cameron Creek homes to City water services. To be eligible for nomination, a project must have been 90% complete within two calendar years of the nomination. The project was considered complete on May 4, 2015. Criteria to be used in the selection process include:

1. Development of the project to meet a perceived need of the community. Even before Cameron Creek's shallow wells began failing, Farmersville had already identified a problem with the wells' water quality. In 2013, the City conducted water quality testing of the existing wells and eight samples produced water containing total coliform bacteria. Self Help Enterprises found contaminated water samples in two more wells in April 2014. "The constructed water project now provides domestic potable water to the Cameron Creek Colony that meets State water quality requirements and is monitored on a continual basis by the City's Public Works Department," stated the application.

2. Use of alternative materials, practices, or funding that demonstrates a commitment to sustainability. As a community of individual wells, Cameron Creek Colony did not have an established community water system and its residents could not collectively afford the cost of forming one, or maintaining one moving forward. Similarly, the City did not have adequate funding to take on an additional debt service to pay for the improvements necessary for a

neighboring community. By connecting with the City's existing infrastructure and wells, Cameron Creek residents were given a sustainable solution.

3. Unique or unusual accomplishments under adverse conditions that dictated the defined action. The Cameron Creek project required the collaboration of 13 public agencies, non-profits and private entities and yet still happened within two years. As the lead agency, Farmersville had pre-defined the issue and was prepared to act upon notification of available funding which allowed them to remedy a failing community system.

"Due to the fortunate planning and forethought, the issue facing Cameron Creek Colony and the City of Farmersville was timely addressed to address the emergency situation," the application stated.

4. Economic challenges that the community faced and the rationale of the option chosen. The Cameron Creek Colony is comprised of approximately 300 residents with a median household income of approximately \$26,000 per year which qualifies as a severely disadvantaged community and a high percentage of families are renters.

"These residents did not have the time or ability to take on such a burden. The City of Farmersville seemed like the only viable solution, but again, placing the project costs on a good neighbor did not seem fair."

When emergency grant funding became available from USDA and SWRCB, the City Council quickly took action to apply for the funding and both grant applications were approved in August 2014.

5. Creative use of municipal resources, equipment, labor, or funds that produced measurable benefits to the community. Some residents were able to dig the trenches, install a service lateral, and make the connection on their own. Those residents were assisted by the Tulare County Building Department in obtaining the proper permits and by instructing them on proper construction techniques to meet required codes. Those unable to do the work themselves were assisted by volunteers with Self Help Enterprises. Self Help, in turn, was assisted by a \$50,000 grant from Bank of the Sierra to assist in the permit costs and materials needed to make the connections.

"Without this funding, many of the residents might still be looking for resources to connect to the new water meters that were installed in front of their homes," stated the application.

6. Construction processes that minimize the impact to the community and its residents during construction. Quad Knopf carefully selected West Valley Construction Inc. for their track record in completing projects while allowing residents access to their homes from the street.

7. Demonstrate awareness of opportunities for environmental preservation during the project and how they were incorporated in the project design and construction. In order to connect Cameron Creek to the City water system, the project had to cross a creek owned and maintained by the Consolidated Peoples Ditch Company. Quad Knopf staff worked with representatives from the ditch company to make sure that no work disturbed or impacted the existing waterway.

8. Additional conditions deemed of importance to the public works agency, such as exceptional efforts to maintain quality control and, if value engineering is used, construction innovations as evidenced by time and/or money-saving techniques developed and/or successfully utilized. While construction progressed rapidly, elements were added to increase safety for the community. Six new fire hydrants were installed along the pipeline route. The new hydrants allow the Fire Department (both City and County) to respond more readily to structure or grass fires. "In the past, the responding fire department would have to have additional water tenders available or disengage from a fire in order to go to a surrounding location to refill the tanks," the application stated.

The project also installed new meters with Automatic Meter Reading (AMR). The technology allows the City's Public Works Department to read the meters without undue labor, provide a method to monitor excessive use or identify leaks.