

Visalia-Times Delta

Water relief comes to neighborhood north of Visalia

By Luis Hernandez

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Janice Gearing said she was better off putting down the microphone and cutting short her comments during a water infrastructure project groundbreaking ceremony Thursday afternoon.

Any additional comments, she said, would have brought emotions flooding in.

“I am going to start crying,” she said.

Gearing is among the residents just north of Visalia who will benefit from a project that calls for the installation of a new water main on Avenue 322, east of Highway 63. The project will also bring water meters and fire hydrants. The residents benefiting had their domestic well go dry nearly two years ago.

“It has been a long process,” Gearing said.

The project is the result of cooperation between California Water Service, Tulare County, Self Help-Enterprises and 11 Rotary clubs, who made a monetary donation to bridge a money gap and ensure the project was completed.

The funding brought in \$192,000. The donation from Rotary was \$29,500.

The state funding called for installation of four-inch pipe. But to have fire hydrants installed, the water main must be six inches in diameter. The donation from Rotary paid for the pipe upgrade.

“We are here to meet people’s needs,” said Jim Sullins, Visalia County Center Rotary president. “This was a wonderful opportunity. We didn’t have to work with boundaries of the county. We were able to talk to some people and make this deal possible.”

Sullins said Rotary clubs from Visalia, Tulare, Porterville, Selma and Fresno donated funds that were then used to get additional money from the Rotary Foundation.

Rotary, Sullins said, is about service and improving the community.

“And the community has no boundaries,” he said.

On Thursday, representatives from Rotary clubs were on hand to be part of the ceremony. With the ability to connect to the main line, residents can move away from using water tanks that need to be filled monthly – at a cost to homeowners.

Local representatives praised Rotary for their involvement.

“This provides a permanent solution,” Tulare County Supervisor Steve Worthley. “They have a permanent fix.” Connecting to Visalia’s water system, the residents can also move from domestic wells and pumps, Worthley said.

“This is the community doing the right thing,” said California Assemblyman Devon Mathis (R-Visalia). “Rotary: You have done an amazing job. I am proud of my community.”

Mathis said he's working on legislature to financially help similar projects.

Gearing said her home's well failed in early 2013. She said her family struggled using water tanks. Water use was cut, but it was a pain to do the laundry elsewhere and take showers at relatives' homes or at work. To conserve water, Gearing said shorter showers and not flushing the toilet every time were common practices. She said the family used less than 4,000 gallons of water monthly.

"We became water saving experts," she said. "We were that good."

It was much of the same for Manuel Hernandez, another resident in the area.

"We had to find out where to take our clothes to wash," he said.



Cal Water and the local rotary clubs hold a ground breaking Thursday, April 28, 2016 on Avenue 322 east of Highway 63 for a water project that will bring water to 14 county residents in the area whose wells have run dry. Some have been without water for nearly two years.

Hernandez said he's glad the new water main is being installed to improve the water service.

"I would say it's a nice, good, awesome work," he said.

Jessi Snyder, Self-Help Enterprises community development specialist, said the project will start on the east end of Avenue 322. Residents will be connecting to the system by June.

Gearing said it would cost about \$1,000 to connect to the system.

Worthley said the project north of Visalia is just one example of how the drought and wells running dry are affecting Tulare County residents.

There are plans to install a new water system to serve residents in East Porterville, Worthley said. In that area, an estimated 400 wells have failed.

Sullins said he's hopeful the project north of Visalia may be the template to help others in similar situations solve their issues.

"That might be more valuable than the project itself," he said.