

Well brings safe water to Monson

By Jackson Moore
Sentinel staff

After more than a decade of efforts, the community of Monson now has a brand new well and water system to bring safe and reliable water to residents.

On Nov. 20, more than 50 people joined together to celebrate its grand opening, and to see the first turn of a faucet producing clean water.

Lazara "Lala" Luengas received the honor to do so, as the ceremony was held at her Monson home adjacent to the large well. The new well is located southeast of the intersection at Avenue 388 and Campbell Avenue.

"We have clean water in Monson," Luengas told the crowd. "This new well means so much to us. From finding out we had contaminated water and now our children can drink safe water - thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

In recent years, Monson residents learned that the water in their wells was unsafe to drink with nitrate levels three times the legal limit. Even that water dried up during recent drought years. Many relied on bottled water and temporary water tanks - deliveries that were provided by the city of Dinuba and Oroisi Public Utility District.

Approximately 30 homes in Monson are now connected to the water distribution system.

It had been quite some time since Monson residents could complete simple tasks like washing clothes or showering.

"We don't have to boil water anymore," Luengas said of washing dishes. "We didn't want to waste the water for the hot water to come out."

"When we took our showers, we would just wet our bodies and turn off the water, soap ourselves, rinse off and that's it. We did that for four years."

The California Department of Water Resources, California State Water Board and USDA Rural Development Program funded the \$2.11 million project. Support was also provided by Self-Help Enterprises, CSET, the community action agency for Tulare County and several Tulare County Rotary Clubs.

Emergency funds from the state of California were used due to the necessity of the well after the drought.

Tulare County Supervisor of District Four Steve Worthley, who represents Monson in his district, spoke to those in attendance. Worthley attended the old Monson School as a child.

"When I look at this project, this is the example of a silver lining," Worthley said. "Who would have thought of the good things coming out of the drought? Because really without the drought, we would not be here today. And we would still have issues in this community of small lots with their drinking water and their septic systems sometimes in very close proximity, and very high nitrate levels."

Michael Prado Sr., President of the Sultana Community Services District, also played a key role in collaborating with the nearby Monson community.

Prado told those in attendance, "Being as we share a school together, Monson-Sultana... When they came with this problem in the drought, wells running dry - we have children that attend our school from Monson. Our board got together and said, 'We need to share our water if we can, until they come up with a solution.' We share the school, why can't we share the water? We're already bonded."

The joint effort will grow in Phase Two of this project. The next step will be an additional well in Sultana. The two water systems will then be inter-

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Monson resident Lazara Luengas sees clean water come out of her outside faucet at her home on Nov. 20. Next to her is Michael Prado Sr., president of the Sultana Community Service District.

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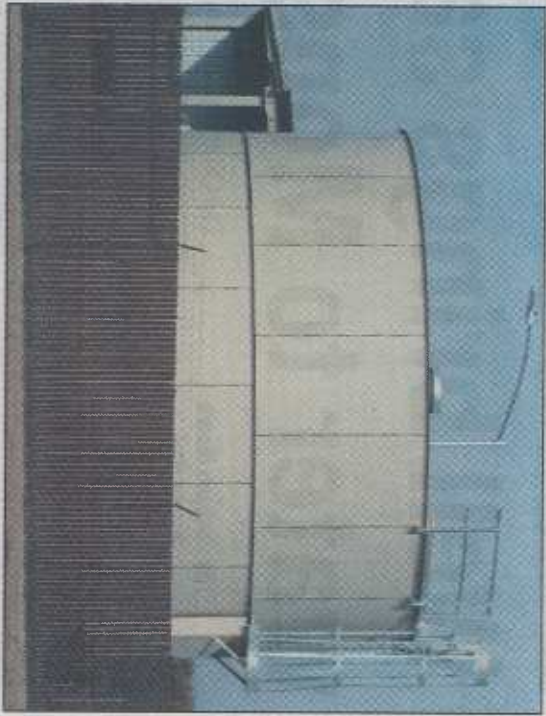


Residents of Monson, and the people who helped bring a well to the community, joined together on Nov. 20 to celebrate the opening of the well.

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Monson resident Lazara Luengas fills her pitcher with clean drinking water from her kitchen faucet.



The community of Monson's new well.

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connected between the two communities, including about 200 homes in Sultana.

Prado said he hoped to see the second phase completed between 2020 and 2022. The Sultana Community Services District will own and operate the water system for both communities.

Said Prado, "Between the two systems, we're going to keep the

towns alive with water... Where water flows, clean healthy people live and will grow."

Chad Fischer, Tulare District Engineer for the State Water Resources Control Board, commended the Monson residents for their commitment to the project.

Fischer said, "In a community like this that has 100 to 150 residents, to go to a meeting

where 60 to 80 people show up is just incredible. The level of engagement and leadership that the people here in Monson demonstrated was just really outstanding. I wish it happened more. What a great example of community engagement."

Self-Help Enterprises Community Development Manager Maria Herrera added, "I'm really excited. It brought

back memories of the almost 10 years I've been working out here - the very first meeting we had out here with the residents. I remember there were several residents that asked, 'When is this going to happen?' I said, 'I look forward to the day we can gather together and celebrate the turning on of a faucet that can deliver water' and today is the day."



Steve Worthley, Tulare County Supervisor of District Four, spoke to the residents of Monson. Worthley attended the old Monson School as a child.



Chad Fischer, Tulare District Engineer for the State Water Resources Control Board, commended the residents for their commitment.



Patrick Isherwood of Tulare Sunrise Rotary Club talked to the Monson residents during the grand opening ceremony of the well.