mydesert.com
THE DESERT SUN PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

October 22, 2009

East valley gains new groundwater plant

Mariecar Mendoza
The Desert Sun

The Coachella Valley Water District dedicated its first east valley full-scale groundwater replenishment facility, which promises gallons of water to generations of desert residents.

Several valley leaders, including Sen. John Benoit, R-Bermuda Dunes, attended the dedication ceremony of the the Thomas E. Levy Groundwater Replenishment Facility on Wednesday, named after Levy, who served as the district's general manager for 16 years.

“The valley has really benefited from the decades he was here and the desert will be the beneficiaries of his solid leadership for years to come thanks to this facility,” Benoit said.

The facility, located west of Monroe Street between Avenue 60 and Avenue 62 in La Quinta, will percolate 40,000 acre-feet of water — 13 billion gallons — annually to the eastern valley's aquifer, said district General Manager Steve Robbins.

That amount of water is about how much 40,000 households use a year.

“This is a milestone for the valley,” Robbins said.

The water is imported from the Colorado River and pumped into the facility's 39 ponds, which span 163 acres.

The cost of the project totaled $44 million.

“It's really quite an honor to have something so important to the future of the Coachella Valley named after me,” said Levy, who retired in 2002. “It is one of the key elements in ensuring that we have adequate water supply for future generations of valley residents.”

The site was originally known as the Dike 4 Pilot Facility and went into operation in 1994.

Construction of the recharge ponds was finished last year with the entire facility completed earlier this year, district officials said.

“It's taken a long time to make this ‘real,' but it's a fantastic project,” Robbins said. “Our projections are that after 30 years of operating this plant, in some parts of the valley, the groundwater levels are going to be over 100 feet higher than they would be at without this project.”

Among all the facts and figures, however, were many jokes about Levy, who worked for the district for three decades.

Peter Nelson, vice president of the CVWD Board of Directors, said Levy reminds him of several notable people — from William Mulholland, for his contributions to California's water system, to Howdy Doody because of his grin.

That grin was also mentioned by Coachella Valley Associations of Governments Executive Director Tom Kirk, who couldn't help mention Levy's fierce negotiating skills and all the battles he lost against Levy during his time with the Salton Sea Authority.

As somewhat of a trophy for Levy's wins and as a reminder of his desert life because Levy now lives

in Orange County, Kirk presented him with a jar of Salton Sea water — and a fan.

“So you can actually take a good whiff,” Kirk said.

CVWD is currently working on another groundwater replenishment pilot project at Martinez Canyon.

Additional Facts

Water is here: Thomas E. Levy Groundwater Replenishment Facility

The Thomas E. Levy Groundwater Replenishment Facility is located on 163 acres of land west of Monroe Street between avenues 60 and 62 in La Quinta.

It is the first full-scale groundwater replenishment facility in the eastern Coachella Valley and will recharge the eastern portion of the aquifer with as much as 40,000 acre-feet of water — 13 billion gallons — per year, which equates to the amount of water used by 40,000 desert homes annually.

In 30 years, groundwater levels in the Coachella Valley are expected to reach up to 105 feet higher than they would be without the CVWD facility.

Cost of the project was $44 million, including land purchases and construction.

The site began as the Dike 4 Pilot Facility in 1994, with 25,000 acre-feet of water recharged at the location over the course of that pilot program.

Final construction of the Thomas E. Levy Groundwater Replenishment Facility was completed earlier this year.

During construction, 25 Native American burn sites and three ancient burial sites were located, said Dan Charlton, engineering manager for the project.

Archaeologists excavated the area and exhumed three bodies.

They also found artifacts, including a peace pipe, that may be the oldest Native American items discovered in the Coachella Valley, with some as old as 2,900 years, Charlton said.

The district is working on another groundwater replenishment pilot project at Martinez Canyon. That project launched in 2005 and is slated to expand by 2014.

Source: Coachella Valley Water District