

Happy 25th Anniversary Virgin Valley Water District

By Kevin Brown, General Manager

The Virgin Valley Water District Act, the legislation that created the Virgin Valley Water District, was approved by the Nevada State Legislature and the Governor of Nevada on May 10, 1993. In the beginning of the District, the assets of the Mesquite Farmstead Water Association were used to create the Virgin Valley Water District. The District served the City of Mesquite and some residents living in Arizona at the stateline. In 1995, the State Legislation was amended to expand the District's service area by annexing the Bunkerville Water User's Association.

In the 1940's the Mesquite Farmstead Water Association and the Bunkerville Water User's Association were formed to provide public drinking water for their respective communities. For the beginnings of water used in the Virgin Valley, you have to go back to the original pioneers who came to the area in the 1870's.

In those early days, there were no wells, no clear mountain springs to use for a cool drink of water; there was only the Virgin River. Now if you aren't familiar with the Virgin River, you might be shocked to learn that it isn't a blue ribbon trout fishing river. The dissolved salts and the suspended dirt in the river make it look like flowing chocolate milk and taste rather salty. Nonetheless, the early pioneers had that available to them and they used it. They used it to drink. They used it to bathe. They used it to cook. They used it to irrigate. They used it to stay cool. It was the only water available. To make it a little more palatable and taste a little better, the pioneers collected the river water into cisterns, sprinkled ashes in the water, stirred the mixture and waited for the solids to settle out. The pioneers then collected the "clearer" water from the top of the cistern and used it for cooking, bathing, and drinking.

The first well in the valley was drilled in 1930 on the old school grounds in Mesquite. The well was 300 feet deep. The well water was not drinkable because of the high amount of dissolved solids (salts) so the water was used in the restrooms of the school. The first "water system" in the Valley was constructed in 1933. Through a small system of pipes, the system connected the Bunkerville High School and ten homes that utilized irrigation water from the Bunkerville irrigation canal. Soon after this, a 25,000 gallon and a 10,000 gallon concrete tank were constructed. The 10,000 gallon tank was built near the canal, the 25,000 gallon tank built on "Tank Hill". Water was pumped from the 10,000 gallon tank up to the 25,000 gallon tank. The water from the 25,000 gallon tank then flowed into the system that served the ten homes and high school.

In the mid 1930's, a plan was developed, funding was provided by the Soil Conservation Service, and labor from local residents and the Civilian Conservation Corps to develop several springs in the Virgin Mountains and construct a pipeline to bring the water part way down the

mountain to a small dam near the mouth of Cabin Canyon. The small dam is still intact and is near the District's existing steel tank high up near the mountains. Residents from the valley could then drive wagons or trucks to the dam and fill water barrels with much better quality water than the river water. A small water tank was built next to the dam for residents to receive their water (mainly because the small dam site had become a convenient swimming hole). Once enough funds were collected, a new tank, further down the mountain was constructed. It became known as the "Three Mile Tank". The name, Three Mile Tank, is because the tank is almost exactly three miles from the location of where the bridge between Mesquite and Bunkerville is located. The tank was unique in that it had a wall inside the tank that separated the water into a 60%/40% split. The 60% side was for Mesquite residents. The 40% side was for Bunkerville residents.

In 1938, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints funded a project to construct separate waterlines from the "Three Mile Tank" to Bunkerville and Mesquite. Now local residents could go to the local standpipe and obtain water in town instead of having to drive up the mountain to the Three Mile Tank.

In the mid to late 1940's, funding was secured to provide a rudimentary water distribution system. For Bunkerville, the Bunkerville Water User's Association was responsible for the distribution system. For Mesquite, it was the Mesquite Farmstead Water Association that was responsible for the distribution system.

The two water companies continued to provide water for the next few decades. In the 1960's several deep wells were drilled to tap into a deeper aquifer. This deeper aquifer provided much better water quality than the river and the shallow aquifer. As the population in the Virgin Valley began to grow, more deep wells were drilled, spring use was discontinued.

In the early 1990's the Mesquite Farmstead Water Association (a private company) petitioned the Nevada State Legislature to form a Water District (public entity). Becoming a public entity allowed the District to have access to public funding from federal and state funds for improvements. As mentioned above, the Bunkerville Water User's Association became part of the Virgin Valley Water District in 1995.

Torrid growth from the late 1990's until 2007 required the District to develop several new deep wells and new water tanks. Also, to comply with the then new arsenic standard established by the Environmental Protection Agency, the District built five new arsenic removal treatment plants in 2009 at a cost of \$28,000,000.

Currently, the Virgin Valley Water District has 160 miles of pipe in the ground, nine deep wells, seven water storage tanks, five arsenic treatment plants, over 9,000 metered accounts, and over 20,000 acre-feet of water rights. The District continues to grow its' infrastructure to keep up with the new growth spurt we are realizing. Wells by the Bank of Nevada and in Bunkerville are

being constructed now. A new well north of Mesquite is in the planning stages. A new arsenic treatment facility will be built to treat the water from the new well in Bunkerville. A new water tank and transmission line will start construction later this year to serve the Sun City area. The District continues to replace old failing pipe a little at a time.

As part of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, the District tests for over 90 potential contaminants. The District consistently meets or is lower than the established public health standards. The single family average monthly use is 8,900 gallons – indicating water conservation is occurring. The days of draconian culinary water rate increases are behind us. After 25 years of ups and downs, the District's management team, staff, operators, and Board of Directors is now strong with an eye to the future and at the same time making sure current needs are met. Abraham Lincoln said it best: "You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today." Here's to another one score and five (25) years!