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Water is once again on the agenda

During a recent visit by Texas State Representative Drew Darby in Robert Lee on November 10, 2021, water was on the minds of many residents in attendance. This is nothing new for Coke County. Water is often on the minds and agendas of the Bronte and Robert Lee governing boards.

Rep. Darby recounted a story to the audience from the time a temporary pipeline was laid alongside State Highway 158 bringing treated water from Bronte to Robert Lee. A Robert Lee city official told Rep. Darby that his citizens could not afford a \$5/month increase on their water bill. Darby responded with a question. "Can your citizens afford to pay to have water trucked in?" The answer was obviously no.

The above conversation was held after the levels dropped in EV Spence Reservoir to less than 1% capacity and the water

was too bad to use. This lake level, along with the depletion of Mountain Creek Lake, was primarily due to the 2011 drought.

On January 20, 2012, ground was broken for a new permanent pipeline to bring water from Bronte to Robert Lee. Water began flowing through the \$2.8 million pipeline on May 22, 2012, and Robert Lee citizens no longer had to fear that nothing would come out when they turned on the faucet.

The community feeling between Coke County residents seemed at an all-time high as they came together to find a solution to this overwhelming problem. However almost 10 years out, resentment can be seen building in citizens on both sides of the county. Some Robert Lee citizens want their own water supply and treatment plant and some Bronte citizens are concerned that by

WEEK AT A GLANCE

Friday, November 26

School Holiday -
Bronte ISD, Robert Lee, ISD, Blackwell CISD

Monday, November 29

Junior High Basketball -
Bronte at Water Valley, 5 pm
Sterling City at Robert Lee, 5 pm
Irion County at Blackwell, 5 pm

Tuesday, November 30

High School Basketball -
Paint Rock at Bronte, 5 pm
Highland at Robert Lee, 4 pm
Veribest at Blackwell, 4 pm

Wednesday, December 1

School Holiday -
Blackwell CISD

Thursday, December 2

High School Basketball -
Bronte at Miles Tournament
Robert Lee at Highland Tournament
Blackwell at Munday Tournament

Friday, December 3

High School Basketball -
Bronte at Miles Tournament
Robert Lee at Highland Tournament
Blackwell at Munday Tournament

Angel Tree Adoption Available,
Bella B's, Downtown Robert Lee

Saturday, December 4

Small Town Christmas, Downtown Robert Lee



continuing to provide water to Robert Lee, Bronte's water may run out and, at the least, cost Bronte citizens more each month.

Let's look at the current situation.

- Robert Lee has no rights to water in EV Spence Reservoir, owned by Colorado River Municipal Water District.

- Robert Lee's water plant was condemned by the state once it was shut down and to treat water, a new plant would have to be constructed.

- State agencies have overseen this situation from the beginning, only allowing Bronte to charge "cost plus 10%" for carrying and treating Robert Lee's allotment. When the usage on the west side of the county goes over the allotment, overage charges kick in.

- Robert Lee, along with Coke County Water Supply Corporation, are currently using 225 acre feet per year when their allotment is only 150 acre feet per year.

- When water began flowing to Robert Lee in 2012, the water running through Bronte's

treatment plant increased 150% immediately. During times of "peak load" (summer), water running through the plant exceeds 90% of the plant's ability to process. Once this happens, state agencies can possibly intervene demanding steps be taken to remediate the situation.

- The water pipeline leading from Oak Creek Lake to the water treatment plant in Bronte is only capable of carrying approximately 60% of Bronte and Robert Lee's allotments combined. This leaves 40% of their combined allotments in the lake and subject to high evaporation levels. It was stated at a recent meeting, "If we don't use the water, we lose the water."

- Although there is sufficient water available through the allotments, Bronte's water treatment plant is not sufficient to continue treating the amount of water needed for the three entities - Bronte, Robert Lee and CCWSC. The plant utilizes sand filtration and therefore cannot be expanded. It can be upgraded, but that would not solve the problem caused by the raw water supply line being too

small to carry all of the combined allotments.

- Bronte's water quality qualifies as "superior".

- To summarize, the water lines leading from Oak Creek Lake to Bronte are too small to carry sufficient water and Bronte's water plant is too small to treat sufficient amounts of water.

Two years ago, Bronte contracted with Jacob and Martin to perform a study on the water plant and water supply and to see how it compares with TCEQ requirements. Following the \$25,000 job, Jacob and Martin recommended the following.

- Building a water treatment plant closer to Oak Creek Lake.

- Replace the current 10" line into Bronte with a 14" line, making it possible to carry two million gallons per day.

At the time of their recommendation (May 2021), the cost of the total project - new plant, new intake, new lines, storage, and 8-10 miles of treated water pipeline, would be approximately \$12.5 million.

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