

Project a long time coming



RDOS Area D director Bill Schwarz shakes hands with Okanagan Coquihalla MP Dan Albas, who was on hand with Boundary Similkameen MLA John Slater (left) and Penticton MLA Bill Barisoff at the announcement of the OK Falls wastewater treatment plant.

Kristi Patton/Western News

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It was a long six years for Bill Schwarz, but on Wednesday he finally gripped the gold-plated shovel to pose for a photo breaking ground for the new wastewater treatment plant for Okanagan Falls.

“In fact, it is quite possible he would not be retiring had this grant money not come through,” quipped Dan Albas, MP for Okanagan Coquihalla.

“When you look around Okanagan Falls and you see the waterfront, the Okanagan river system, it is easy to see why it is so important to expand wastewater treatment in order to protect our environment.”

Schwarz, who decided not to run this municipal election, fought for six years to get the wastewater treatment plant. Through federal and provincial funding partnerships, Area D received \$6.2 million

through the Building Canada Fund, with the remaining money coming from the RDOS and the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

“I have learned more about how you process the stuff, more than you would ever want to know,” joked Schwarz. “But, seriously, today is a very important day to the community and South Skaha. It’s important for those residents living near the existing sewer plant. When they bought in there they were told that plant was going to move and that was 12 to 14 years ago. It is coming to fruition and it will be out of there.”

The \$11.5 million project is expected to be completed in November 2012.

The plant will ensure proper wastewater disposal for not only Okanagan Falls, but the entire South Skaha region as the collection system expands. Schwarz said the new plant will also lift restrictions for growth in the area. In 2003, Schwarz said he received a study from the public works department revealing some disastrous details.

“In the summer months the sewer was operating beyond capacity. There were times when we were sending untreated sewage into the RI basin, it just couldn’t handle what was coming through. It scared the heck out of me. The stuff is going down into the ground, and in the ground is an aquifer that gets the water I drink and that concerns me,” said Schwarz, adding immediately he found a short-term solution using a special filter at the old plant. “Now that this is going ahead development can also go through.”

Residents in Kaleden will now be able to get off septic systems and eliminate the one-hectare policy that hindered development for many.

When the system was built 35 years ago, Schwarz said there was no development cost charges — a major oversight by the politicians of the time because no money was put aside for upgrades.

“We will never have to go with our hat in hand on the street corner to the provincial and federal governments to upgrade this system, because as more users come on they will be paying development cost charges. Those are sufficient to expand the system as needed,” said Schwarz.

The \$11.5 million project is underway at 300 Rail Rd. to replace the existing facility located adjacent to a residential area. The waste water will be treated with conventional biological nutrient removal technology, making it available for local irrigation and discharge into the Vaseux Lake wetlands. The long-term goal is to divert the discharge to the neighbouring Vaseux wetland area and to enhance its natural environment.