

Investing In A Future – Western Completes Water System Improvements Clancy Dempsey

While recently traveling as part of my Training Specialist duties, I had the opportunity to stop in the Village of Western and visit with Dwight “Butch” Nickel, the Utility Superintendent. This Saline County village, population 287, had undergone quite a project to improve their water system. Here are some of the highlights.

Before the project, the village relied upon two wells on the edge of town to supply drinking water. They began to experience serious water quantity issues five years ago during the drought. With the cooperation of local residents the village successfully implemented water conservation practices that allowed the system to get by. But it was clear that the only long-term solution was to locate a new water source. To find adequate water quantity and good quality, it was necessary to drill a new well two miles from town and install a new 8-inch transmission main that was tied into the village system. The new well is equipped with a right angle drive for emergency situations. This was just the start for Western. The village also built a new 75,000 gallon elevated storage tank. This replaced the old pressure tank that was located in the village shop building. The old pressure tank was 8 feet in diameter, 38 feet long, had a capacity of around 15,000 gallons, and was installed in 1938. As you can imagine, limited water storage capacity and the limited pumping capacity of the village’s two old wells could cause an operator some sleepless nights. Needless to say, Butch is resting much better at night with the new well and tower in operation.



The improvements to the system didn’t stop there. Fourteen blocks of old 4-inch cast iron main was replaced with six-inch plastic. Thirty new valves were replaced or installed around town. Fourteen hydrants were replaced or installed new. And 182 meters were installed in residences and businesses. This had a significant impact on water usage, which is down 30-35%. As you might guess, this was probably water that was being wasted prior to meter installation. Residents have adjusted to meters pretty well. Water rates were restructured to insure the village could pay off the debt they incurred from investing in the project. The new rate structure was the result of a rate study performed by Randy Hellbusch of Nebraska Rural Water. The new rates are \$22 per month for



service and \$2 per thousand. This was not a dramatic increase over the previous rates and has gone over well with residents.

The Village of Western's project began in September of 2006 and officially concluded in December of 2007 when the new water tower was put into service.

Butch expressed that the project was very time consuming, required a lot of attention and long hours, but the end result was well worth the effort.

Financing was provided by a combination grant and loan from USDA Rural Development. Total project expenses were about \$1.1 million. But the cost to make a community attractive to families and businesses cannot be counted in dollars and cents. This was an investment that will yield returns to the village for a very long time.

