



## Santa Paula's new water recycling facility officially completed



The Santa Paula water recycling plant is located behind the old plant off Corporation Road. Above is a night shot of the plant. A large pond of water in front is used for storm water containment. The majority of the systems used to treat wastewater is located below the main building pictured above.



The Santa Paula water recycling plant is complete and meets the State Water Quality standards. The plant was built on time. The deadline for the completion of the plant was December 15. The plant with miles of piping, filters, and treatment has been online for several months and has been working as designed and planned.

By Peggy Kelly

*Santa Paula Times*

When Santa Paula's aging wastewater plant received an updated permit in 1997, it started a chain of events that will culminate Wednesday with the official sanction by the state of the city's new water recycling facility. The approximately \$58 million plant is processing about two million gallons of sewage a day, and as the city grows the facility is capable of handling up to 4.2 MGD. The city was not responsible for any upfront payments and began paying a monthly service fee once the facility was in operation. The monthly service fee of approximately \$500,000 a month includes payment of the plant, operation, maintenance and future capital replacements and is based on daily flows. The service fee is scheduled to run the next 30 years.

In 2000 the city began to rack up fines for polluting discharges into the Santa Clara River, a situation unknown by the City Council who for years had a contractor operating the facility. Citizens living near the plant had also been complaining for years that noxious odors plagued their

neighborhoods.

By 2003 the city was negotiating with the State Regional Water Quality Control Board to get a grip on the fines that were expected to hit up to \$10 million resulting from the plant, built in 1939, being unable to meet the discharge requirements of the 1997 permit.

One of the provisions of the consent decree reached by the city team of then Mayor John Procter, then Vice Mayor Gabino Aguirre, then City Manager Wally Bobkiewicz, City Attorney Karl Berger and the state was that Santa Paula would build a new state-of-the-art facility with a mandated completion/fully operational deadline of December 15, 2010. The \$8 million plus in fines accrued by the city would instead be applied to the new facility, although the city paid about \$400,000 directly to the state as part of the deal.

What followed was years of study, Council meetings, and the abandonment of an initial plan between Santa Paula and Fillmore - also under the state gun - to share a new facility. The effort to

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Steve Owen, Vice-President PERC Water holds a beaker full of water that is at the end of the treatment process. The water is then sent to a percolation pond.

## City Council: Update on Bicycle Trail, street work requested

By Peggy Kelly  
*Santa Paula Times*

The citizen representative to the Ventura County Transportation Commission asked the City Council for an update on the Santa Paula Branch Line Bicycle Trail and expressed concern over the disrepair of city streets at the December 6 meeting. John Bravo told the council they had appointed him in January to the VCTC citizen advisory committee.

"The things we're talking about is the bike path we're supposed to be building," and Bravo said he would appreciate feedback "when we start," to be prepared to report on the issue at the committee's next meeting. There was a groundbreaking ceremony for the \$4.1 million grant funded trail - which will run from 12th Street to Peck

Road - in late October. The city had to match the funding with \$400,000.

The trail will offer other amenities, including a rest stop and kiosk with information on the city and local attractions located near the historic Depot. Construction on the trail was announced to begin in mid-to late November; the total project will take just under a year to complete.

Bravo told the council he is concerned about the state of city streets. Numerous thoroughfares, including 6th and Yale streets, "need fixing badly...it's getting so people don't want to drive those streets," and Bravo questioned city funding that is targeted for upgrades.

City Manager Jaime Fontes said the Santa Paula Branch Line Bicycle Trail has "already

begun" and is going through its initial stages. "We are at the last portion of the acquisition," and Fontes said he has been in discussions with Ventura County Transportation Commission Executive Director Darren Kettle on the project's status. The project will be in full construction mode in several months, and should be completed at about the same time the Ventura County Farm Museum - located in the historic Mill in the Railroad Plaza - opens.

When it comes to city streets, Fontes said the city has a \$5 million set-aside - culled from an approximate \$35 million city utility bond earmarked for capital improvements - for road and related work. The funding will cover work in four categories: signage that is out of compliance and must be replaced, stripping,

"slip and trip" sidewalk hazards, and potholes.

"It will all be done in one shot," and Fontes said a survey of "slip and trip" sidewalk locations has been completed. Now the "scope of work" is being examined and coordinated with the county for signage needs.

When it comes to pavement needs, Fontes said the present allotment of \$5 million would "merely pave Harvard Boulevard" from 10th to Palm Avenue. To repave Harvard Boulevard all the way to Peck Road Fontes estimated would cost about \$10 million.

"We're trying to spread it all over town in terms of priority," and Fontes said the city will "look at streets, look at the worse ones...by that I mean" those that carry the most traffic. Fontes said there is also a printout of road repair "done in the last year... but we'll see an increase" as new work begins.

## State Schools Chief releases 2008-09 dropout and graduation rates

By Brian D. Wilson  
*Santa Paula Times*

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell has released the annual report on dropout and graduation rates for the 2008-09 school year.

The Santa Paula Union High School District shows a dropout rate of 18.2 percent. That's a 12 percent jump from last year. SPUHSD Superintendent Dr. David Gomez said it's really not that high, although he admits it is higher than the one or two percent reported in past years. He said some of the increase is because of the new measurement system now being used. "We're making sure our data is correct," he said. There are a number of students who leave the district each year, mostly migrant families returning to Mexico. He said

that the district is now required to track students who leave.

"The new system will be more reliable than in the past," he added. The problem, he said is that sometimes families leave the area and don't tell the district and then they are considered to be dropouts.

Gomez also said, "We're making sure that appropriate intervention steps are taken when a student doesn't have enough credits to graduate. We have on-line classes and summer school to make sure they do get credits so they do graduate."

In 2008-09, 70.1 percent of public school students in California graduated from high school, up from 68.5 percent last year. The adjusted four-year derived dropout rate for the

**GRADS: Continued on Page 2**

# Facility:

build a new plant was at times controversial, with the council considering a new technology involving deep shaft treatment.

The water recycling plant issue created splits in the community and among the council, but today the city's new water recycling facility, located south of the old plant, is one of the first of its kind in the state and the only such operation created through the Design/Build/Operate/Finance process.

After a long bidding process, PERC Water and Alinda Capital Partners joined together to form a DBOF partnership, Santa Paula Water, which designed, built, operated and financed the plant.

The city retains ownership of the property where the plant sits.

According to Finance/Acting Public Works Director John Quinn, the last steps are in process: "We've drafted a final report that will be mailed out as soon as we get done editing it... it's more of the same" in a series of state correspondence on the status of the new plant.

This document, though, will be the last one: "We're saying everything is in compliance with the WDR" Water Discharge Requirement.

No longer is the end product of the plant discharged into the Santa Clara River. The new PERC plant produces Title 22

high-grade crystal clear water that is discharged into nearby percolation ponds that gradually replenish the aquifer. Quinn said the city has provided the state RWQCB with Santa Paula letters of "substantial completion... we're in the process of giving them the final notice of completion and our letter to PERC is the state's part of that."

Ground for the new plant was broken in July 2008, just two months after the contract was signed and a little more than a week ahead of the state mandated start date. From then on construction was ahead of schedule, with test batches and then full operation reached months before the initial September 15, 2010 deadline and even earlier than the December 15 full completion/operational deadline.

With a gentle tiered waterfall in the front, the purpose of which is storm water containment, the new plant is small, its footprint one of layers; the facility is largely built over concrete holding and processing tanks. There is only a slight, musky odor when hatches leading to the underground basins ranging from 24 to 30 feet are opened.

"Everything," notes PERC

Water Operations Manager Gina Dorrington, "can be pulled up" for maintenance. A separator discharges the trash that can be found in sewage, plastic bags and other debris, and the sewer sludge fills about eight oversized bins each week - 28 metric tons a month - for disposal at Toland Road Landfill.

PERC Vice President Steve Owen said, "Redundancy is built in," so if one tank is disabled for repair a second one kicks in for processing, preventing any downtime for repairs. The complicated treatment process utilizes blowers, scrubbers and aerobic digesters among other equipment for the 24-7 plant operation that can be controlled on an iPhone or iPad via Central PERC.

Although there are two other operators that work each day with Dorrington on an eight-hour shift, she said computer technology allows access to equipment "24 hours a day." Dorrington

demonstrated on a purple iPhone decorated with a large yellow sunflower, noting, "We can see what's going on" and in most cases do adjustments without coming to the plant, which has its own house cat, PERCKins.

"You'd think there'd be firecrackers, maybe a parade," joked Quinn about the official completion of the plant. As it is, there will be a public dedication in the future.

## Santa Paula Art Museum announces the closing reception of the De Colores exhibition

The Santa Paula Art Museum is pleased to announce the closing reception for the 17th Annual De Colores art exhibition on Thursday, December 30th from 6-8:30 PM. The exhibition highlights the narrative paintings and cultural story telling of forty Latino visual artists. The Museum is located at 117 North 10th Street in historic downtown Santa Paula. Reservations are encouraged by calling 805-525-5554 or emailing info@santapaulartmuseum.org. Closing exhibit admission is: \$10.

The program will include a reception hour including guest artists: Louie Moreno, Veronica Valadez, Andrea Vargas-Mendoza, and Jose Zuniga. Musical Entertainment provided by Angels On Harps, and by classical harpist Xavier Montes. The evening also includes spoken word performances by Joseph Castañeda and Vanessa Teran as well as a short film screening by director Karen Farfán.

Because occupancy at the museum is limited we recommend an RSVP to secure entrance.

For further information about the Santa Paula Art Museum please call 805-525-5554 or email them at info@santapaulartmuseum.org.

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by Ken Ludwig

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**CALL for Reservations and Information 805-525-4645**

*Happy Holidays*

**Trash & Recyclables or Green Waste Pick Up Information for Commercial Customers for the Christmas & New Year's Holidays**

Since both Christmas and New Year's Day fall on Saturday this holiday season, only Santa Paula commercial customers of Santa Clara Valley Disposal who normally have their trash and recycling collected on Saturday will have them collected one day later than usual both weeks. Service will remain the same for customers who have their trash and recyclables waste collected on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday.


The regular collection schedule will return the week of Jan. 3-8, 2011.



**Thank you and Happy Holidays**  
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