

Centerton Water & Sewer Department

Prior to the early 1970's, residents of Centerton got their household water by either hauling it home in barrels and jugs, digging a well, sharing a well with a close neighbor, or they laid privately owned service lines and pumped water to their home from the spring that is located at the corner of A and Spring Street, directly behind Bemco, Inc. Home builders Dale Thompson and Sherman Kinyon, both who eventually became Mayors for the City of Centerton, also chose to lay water lines from the spring to home construction sites rather than dig a well onto each newly developed parcel; and it was these handful of pioneers that were the accidental creators of the Centerton Water Department, the sewer department did not evolve at the same pace as the water department, and depending upon personal needs, each homeowner continued to use either a septic system or an outhouse.

Once free flowing, clean drinking water was easily accessible with well water or from the spring, the City of Centerton began to grow, and it wasn't too long before Centerton quickly outgrew the springs' ability to fulfill the demand. The growing community signed a water purchase agreement contract with the City of Bentonville, Bentonville in turn laid a water main along the north side of Highway 102 to the edge of our city limits, at that point Centerton connected to the Bentonville main with a 6-inch meter, big enough to meet the city's current demand and provide water for many more new homes and businesses, along with the added bonus that the new water main would also lower the city ISO (fire hydrant protection) rating; lowering each homeowners insurance premium.

Centerton also signed its first contract with the City of Bentonville to handle all of our sewer needs, and a lift station and force main was built on Allen Road where the city sewer "gravity flowed" to a point of collection and then the lift station would pump/push the sewer, uphill, to a manhole near Hugh Tator Black Memorial Road where it then merged with Bentonville's own gravity flow sewer main, and then later 'treated' at Bentonville's Sewer Treatment Plant. Within 20 years the City of Centerton was providing both water and sewer services to 500 homes (both newly built and previously established), poultry farms and businesses. However, by the late 1990's Centerton had grown so quickly that even the City of Bentonville could not supply Centerton with enough water. And in July 1998, with a bone dry water tower on Keller Road, water superintendent William Coffelt was forced to ration water for all outside usage, and depending upon your home address on odd or even days residents would be allowed to water their flowers, vegetable gardens or fill the kiddie pools. More bad news came when the Arkansas Dept. of Environmental Quality imposed a mandatory moratorium on all building permits the city would be allowed issue; ADEQ engineers believed Centerton was at the maximum capacity our Allen Road lift station and sewer force main could handle, making things very bleak for the City of Centerton; without enough water to provide to new families or sewer services to carry it all away, the city was grinding to a deadly halt!

The imposed building moratorium was choking the life out of our growing community and it was also putting a big hurt on contractors who had previously purchased tracts of acreage to develop large scale sub-divisions but were then declined a standard city issued building permit. After a year or two of arguing with the state, ADEQ agreed to remove the building moratorium if Centerton upgraded the Allen Road lift stations' capacity and increased the force mains' volume. With those major changes, Centerton would also have to negotiate a new sewer contract with the City of Bentonville to specifically revise and increase the quantity of sewer Bentonville agreed to receive from Centerton, this was a big financial burden for Centerton, and city members were nervous about committing to such a contract, all of the "What If's" wreaked havoc, Centerton had never faced that much debt. During a council meeting, with the Council members hedging at the shocking expense to upgrade the sewer lift system and being fearful of signing such an intricate contract with so many variables. Understanding the choke hold that the lack of both water and sewer services had on the city, former Mayor and home builder Dale Thompson said; "if this council doesn't want to sign the new sewer contract with Bentonville, than I suggest we take the few remaining dollars out of the city coffers and buy a plague that reads

“Here is where Centerton once stood”, later that night the council approved the Mayor to sign the new contract with the City of Bentonville.

Centerton was a tiny town, not a wealthy community, the city borrowed half of the lift station remodel funds from the Bank of Bentonville, then they also went on to ask two of the busiest builders in town, ARC Walker Homes Construction and Steele Development if they would cost share the much needed upgrade and major overhaul to the Allen Road lift station and the force main project, thankfully both developers agreed to help the city foot the bill. Once the bigger force line was in and the other sizable remodel with larger wet wells and 50 horse pumps were in place the City of Centerton was ready to sign a new sewer contract with the City of Bentonville, and in September 1998 a 20-year sewer contract was revised and signed to include a substantial increase of sewer flow the City of Bentonville agreed to receive from the City of Centerton.

There was a huge demand for water, not only in Centerton but all over developing western Benton County and northwestern Washington County, and during the mid-1990's a RDA board (Rural Development Association, Sherman Kinyon, Chairman) had been formed, these future thinking members were doing all they could to create, find financing and develop a massive water distribution pipeline from Beaver Lake, to supply water throughout rural communities including the City of Centerton, Pea Ridge, Gravette, Decatur, Gentry, Prairie Grove; the waterline would become known as “2-Ton Water”, abbreviated for Benton and Washington County Regional Public Water Authority.

The 2-Ton project snowballed bigger and bigger throughout the 1990's; Mayor's, Engineers, farmers, industries and various politicians were behind the 71-mile waterline plan, and with so much need for safe drinking water the project easily found its voice, and the purse strings in Little Rock were eager to listen; this major distribution line was no longer a dream, it was becoming a reality, and with the reality of it, Centerton was about to face another battle. Centerton had a water purchase agreement contract with the City of Bentonville, and although the previously installed water main along Highway 102 had been in place for many years and was indeed a God send at the time it had been connected was now too small to supply enough water for our ever expanding community and Centerton once again had outgrown our resources; simply put, Bentonville could no longer supply enough water to satisfy the growing demands from Centerton. With the water rationing of July 1998, William Coffelt reported, “only after midnight when everyone is asleep and the schools, businesses and restaurants are closed, then Bentonville water pumps can fill the stand pipe of our water tower, but puts nothing in the bowl.” Later that Fall, in November 1998, the Centerton Water and Sewer Commission was created by the mayor his city council; a panel of 3 members who meet once a month with the sole objective of maintaining a balance in the development of the City of Centerton's water and sewer system. This group wouldn't be bogged down, diluted or sidetracked by other city topics that the City Council members have to sort through month after month, no these Commissioners focus only on water and sewer issues; on how to get more of it, how to finance more of it, and where is it needed the most. The first commissioners were Ted Kimmel (Chairman), AJ Stroud (Vice Chair) and Randy Gully (Secretary / Treasurer).

The City of Centerton along with the newly formed Water and Sewer Commission was determined to connect to the 2-Ton water when the line becomes charged. Bentonville who held our current water purchase contract was determined Centerton would not be allowed to break their contract, even though Centerton was desperate for more water, the matter would eventually be settled by lawyers, judges and financial compensation. In early 1999 the 2-Ton pipeline was up and running, and just as soon as it was possible, the Centerton Water and Sewer Department connected to the monster sized water main about a mile north of our Keller Road water tower, and in May 1999 the CWSD water tower overflowed for the very first time! With so much water on hand; the city ISO (fire protection rating) was again lowered, saving residents even more on their homeowners' policy.

After the water and sewer hardships of the 1990's, and after the Water Department jumped through countless hoops and climbed over mammoth mountains, CWSD has not looked back; we've continued to be progressive and forward thinking. CWSD purchased an acre of land and installed a vault with a 2nd water tap to the 2-Ton water distribution line. CWSD has also had several sewer projects over the years, with new larger lines laid and old clay lines replaced with much more advanced plastic, ground water infiltration has been drastically reduced, and we've also borrowed funds to build a sewer basin at the Allen Road facility. CWSD has

applied on several occasions for the State to approve Centerton a 'discharge permit' so that we could build our own sewer treatment plant, thus reducing your sewer rates and eliminating the need to use the Bentonville's plant. However, due to ADEQ and EPA strict policies and guidelines, Centerton has been turned down with each application. In 2004 CWSD borrowed funds from the Arkansas Soil and Water Commission, now known as Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, for 31 miles of rural water line laid along Tycoon, Bush, Huber, Motley, Shady Acres, LC Hickman as well as several other roads. The purpose of this rural line was two-fold; it would provide fresh clean drinking water to those who wanted or needed to tap into the new water main, but the enter-connecting lines also eliminate dead end lines where water becomes stagnant and stale; a fair analogy is your own circulatory system. Your blood is forever flowing, never stopping, always on a path to somewhere it needs to be, the same is true for the water that is flowing throughout the CWSD underground water system, constantly moving and providing thirst quenching goodness to whichever faucet it is needed at within a split second. By June 2005 the Benton County Water Authority #1 was ready to sale their water service area of Hiwasse, western Bella Vista, and eastern Gravette. The BCWA board members came to the CWSD board members and asked if CWSD was interested in purchasing their system and the 920 customers the system provides for, their boards' knowing Centerton had the knowledge, manpower, billing software, and management skills to serve their customers, CWSD agreed to the purchase and overnight our customer base count went from 1,800 to 2,700.

The majority of our system has grown as the city itself grows, CWSD does not develop anyone's raw land. Land developers installs roads, water, sewer and other utilities into new sub-divisions, at the end of the project, and after the developers have passed all inspections and they are ready to start selling off lots for contractors to build on, the city accepts the development and the developer gets a "Final" on the site. Once "Finald" CWSD then has the perpetual upkeep on all of the water and sewer mains, and as one sub-division connects to the next sub-division that connects to the next sub-division, our system has grown, other than the rural development projects where we've laid water mains along (mostly) dirt roads. Although, per our sewer contract with the City of Bentonville, CWSD is not allowed to provide any sewer services outside of our city limits, but we are able to provide it if an individual first annexes into our community.

Currently CWSD has nearly 5,000 homes, schools and businesses both public and private connected to our water mains, and although our water and sewer rates are higher than some, we know they are much lower than many others communities in our state. CWSD presently has loan payments on: CWSD 400,000 gallon water tower, 31 mile rural line extension, sewer rehab behind the cemetery along the creek, sewer line extension out west just beyond Graystone Circle and Center Point Convenience store, sewer basin on Allen Road, (former) BCWA rural district purchase, (former) BCWA 1,750,000 gallon water storage tank, the north 2-Ton loop and 2nd vault, and various other construction Change Orders, totaling \$47,000 basic payments per month. Once a month CWSD receives a water bill from the 2-Ton; the Benton Washington Regional Public Water Authority for many millions of gallons of water used throughout our community, our average water bill is \$75,000 to \$95,000 give or take, depending on how hot the weather is. We also get a sewer bill once a month from the City of Bentonville, and it is for the treatment of those many millions of gallons of water that went down every shower drain or bath, tooth brush, sink of dishes, commode flush, garage disposal, dish and clothes washer; and that bill varies from \$85,000 to \$100,000 –CWSD has to collect your monthly bill and so that we can continue to buy more water and more sewer services for you to use at your home next month- sewer is much more expensive to treat than cleansing plain water from Beaver Lake to drink. CWSD has a contract with Utility Services who perform our annual water tower inspections and repairs, \$50,000 a year. CWSD is not indebted beyond loans for our 'system'; there are no notes on our land, buildings, vehicles or inventory. And just like any other business, the rates we charge you are just enough to pay these monthly debts, and to put required funds into the lending agencies mandatory debt service reserves, pay the wages of our 7 employees, and pay for our other monthly expenses like the office phone bill, electric bill and truck fuel and maintenance bills, with a small margin of 'cushion' in case of an emergency.

Contributor: Deborah Lincecum