

# New Water System has Lecompton, KS Ready for Growth



Lecompton's new water treatment plant and softening system.

**F**or years the governing body of the city of Lecompton knew the city didn't have the best quality water in the state of Kansas. The water would be clear, and drinkable for a while but then, it would become dirty, red and nasty. That's how local folks describe it. High iron content is a common problem for much of the ground water in northeastern Kansas. What do you do about it? The city of Lecompton basically started all over. First, some history and Lecompton's is significant.

Lecompton was founded in 1854 and platted on a bluff on the south bank of the Kansas River. It was originally called "Bald Eagle," but then later changed to Lecompton in honor of Samuel D. Lecompte, the chief justice of the territorial supreme court. In the spring of 1855, the town became the official capital of the Kansas Territory. President James Buchanan appointed a governor and officials to establish government offices in Lecompton; construction began on an elegant capitol building. The rejection of the Lecompton Constitution (pro-slavery) was one of the main events that led to the American Civil War in 1861. Lecompton is home to Constitution Hall and Lane University, and was home to the First Kansas Democratic Headquarters. For more information on Lecompton history, please visit [www.lecomptonkansas.com](http://www.lecomptonkansas.com).

Access to water has always been an important aspect of every community's development. At Lecompton, water was directly pumped from one well located north of the city. In late 1950's and early 60's, the city build a treatment plant and constructed a 50,000-gallon storage tank for a population estimated to be less than 300. The water system functioned satisfactorily. In the 1980's, a new well was added, the electrical system in the treatment plant was upgraded, but the water system still delivered the occasional "red water". Parts for the treatment plant were becoming difficult to obtain.

Water Operator Justin Van Winkle comments, "The plant did what it was designed to do, but residents in these modern times want better quality water."

## A pool or a plant?

Past council member and present Mayor Roy Paslay commented, "For the next ten years the city council discussed building and relocating a new water plant." But, what the city also really wanted was a new swimming pool. Lecompton applied for a grant to construct a pool but the application was not approved. "That was a good thing," Mayor Paslay says, adding, "The pool would have been a sea of red water had the city gotten the pool project!"

Being denied funding for a new swimming pool, the governing body decided it was time to improve the quality of the city's water and pursue a new water treatment plant. The city first applied to Kansas Department of Commerce in 2005 for a Community Development Block Grant to help fund the project. The application was denied due to the level of competition among communities and the amount of money available for water and wastewater projects. Trying again in 2006, the city was awarded a \$400,000 CDBG grant in 2007. Funding from USDA Rural Development in the amount of \$2.3



This sign welcomes visitors to Lecompton - a city filled with Kansas history.



**Operator Justin Van Winkle, City Clerk Sandy Nichols and Mayor Roy Paslay review the plans for the city's newly constructed water treatment plant.**

million in a loan/grant combination was also approved. Progress on the project was delayed for almost a year. The project had to be rebid due to costs being in excess of funding. Finally in the fall of 2008, construction began and the new water treatment plant was to be a reality. The bid of \$2,131,750 was awarded to Midland Contractors, Inc. of Topeka, KS. The Kansas Department of Commerce honored Midland Contractors with "Women Owned Business of the year 2010 in Construction" partly because of the Lecompton project. The project consultant was Shafer, Kline and Warren, Inc. of Iola, KS.

The treatment plant features a Tonka filter system. This system was designed and built in Plymouth, MN. The city of Lecompton has the only Tonka filter system in Kansas. This is an aeration, filtration, sedimentation, and gravity filter system. The water hardness problem (before construction) was 400 parts per million. The city added a water softener system to the plant. "This is a relief to the residents. Many of the homes already had softener systems; citizens can now do away with their softeners or use their systems as an added benefit," says operator Justin Van Winkle. The city is softening the water down to 175 parts per million.

The city also installed a new well in 2006, because of need for additional capacity and also to retain the city's water rights. Funds from the city and temporary notes were used to cover the costs of the new well until the USDA Rural Development funding was available.

The city has had four municipal water wells in its history. These were first two wells, both now retired; one well established from the 80's and one well in 2006.

With the new treatment plant project underway, it was recommended the city should also consider a new water tower. The population had nearly doubled to 650 and the old 50,000-gallon storage tank was not sufficient for the community. The city received a \$304,900 grant from Kansas Department of Commerce in 2008. USDA Rural Development awarded funding in of \$455,100 in loan and grant to supplement the CDBG Grant. Phoenix Fabricators



**This filter system installed at Lecompton was manufactured by Tonka Equipment, Plymouth, MN.**

and Erectors, Inc. of Avon, IN was the contractor. The new tower was constructed on the south side of town in anticipation of growth. Banks Construction of Holton, KS did the construction work of pipelines, flush hydrants, valves, road crossings, security fence and all other work to connect the tower to the city water system.

Sandy Nichols, City Clerk, comments, "The water rates had to be increased at least twice since 2007. In order to meet the USDA Rural Development rate for loan/grant funding. City of Lecompton citizens pay \$66.43 for 5,000 gallons of water." The city of Lecompton also works closely with Douglas RWD 3, which serves as Lecompton's emergency backup water source.

Growth could come easily for the city of Lecompton. Lying between two major metropolitan areas, Topeka and Lawrence, and two major lakes, Perry and Clinton reservoirs. The city now has a good water source for growth. Mayor Paslay states, "The city of Lecompton has potential for housing development; in the future; we (the city) could easily become a suburb of the city of Lawrence."

### **An invitation**

I hope that readers will attend the 2011 KRWA Conference set for March 29 – 31 at Century II in Wichita. The program is reprinted in this issue of The Lifeline. Take a look at the 58 training sessions that will be presented; the conference has something for everyone and is 'the event' for water and wastewater utilities each year. The 306 exhibit spaces are a record for the conference. They will be filled with products and services to help people make a difference! Check out the agencies too that will be available to discuss your funding needs.

*Rita has extensive municipal experience with the city of Troy, KS for 11 years. She was a certified EMT and served as the Ambulance Director for two years and supervised the volunteer staff. Rita also worked on or completed most water and wastewater utility reporting requirements. Her focus at KRWA is to provide assistance with applications for funding for community facilities.*

