

Town's long fight for safe supply ends with new treatment plant

Davenport

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DAVENPORT — Mark Fryar remembers stormy winter days on the North Coast when creek water rushed the town's water treatment plant so quickly he had to shut the facility down.

"When it rains here, the water changes very quickly from nice to

terrible," the longtime Davenport water plant manager said Wednesday. "We're able to function in this kind of weather [today], but as soon as it rains, we're dead."

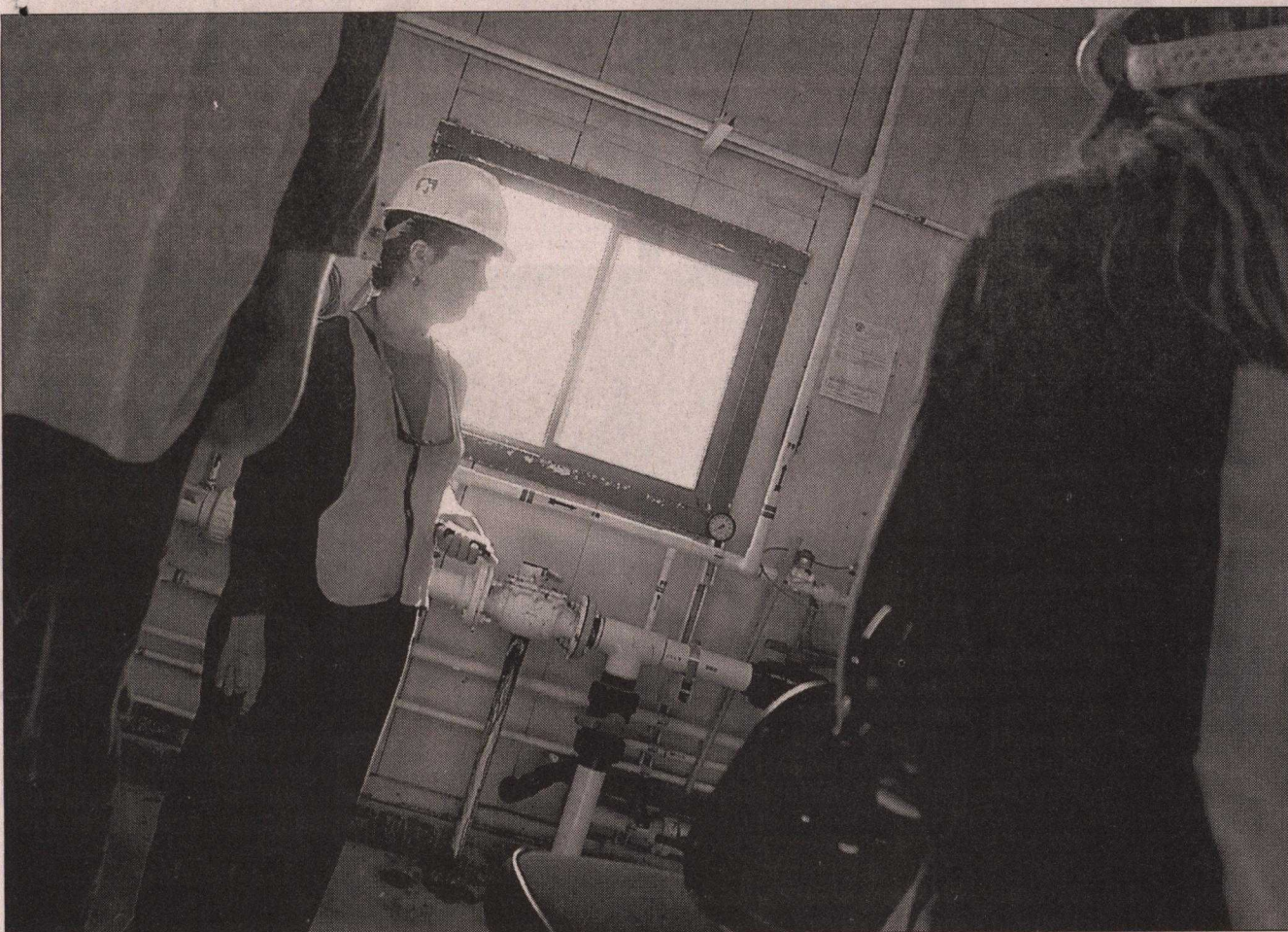
The 25-year-old treatment facility, which sits on the grounds of the Cemex plant and serves both the cement manufacturer and the

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An excavator digs the hole for the new water tank at Davenport's new water treatment plant on Wednesday.



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County Public Works Department engineer Rachel Lather inspects Davenport's outdated water treatment plant on Wednesday. Crews broke ground on the project this week.

WATER

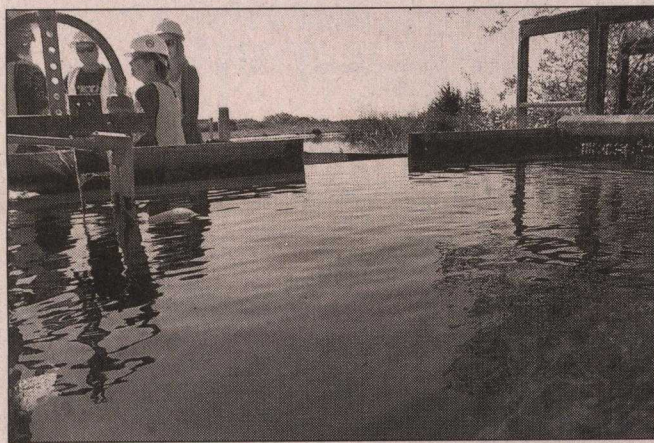
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small town of Davenport, has its problems. Most notable is that it doesn't filter water well enough to meet new state standards for drinking water. Since 2005, during the wet winter months, residents have been on a boil-water notice, local restaurants have had to use expensive purification systems and the school has been forced to turn off its water fountain.

All this is about to change. This week, work began on a new \$1.6 million treatment plant. The county, which manages water treatment, locked up the long-sought funding from federal stimulus money this summer and on Wednesday celebrated the official groundbreaking.

"This is exciting to see the construction actually start," said Fryar, who has been at the plant since 1991 awaiting an upgrade.

The new plant, which will be housed in the same building as the old one but with a new, larger stor-



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County officials including Department of Public Works engineer Rachel Lather and county Supervisor Neal Coonerty's analyst Allison Endert tour the old Davenport water treatment plant on Wednesday.

age tank outside, will be equipped with a new filter system that can handle the often turbid water piped in from nearby San Vicente and Mill creeks. As a result, the roughly 300 residents served by the plant will be assured safer drinking water.

"People complain that in the wintertime, the water gets a little cloudy," said Davenport resident Emilio Jr. Olympia, 71, who has lived in the community his whole life. "The upgrade

will be better for everybody."

Each of the last four winters, the county has offered Olympia, like everyone in town, free bottled water since the safety at their taps can't be guaranteed. However, most, like Olympia, have taken their chances with the public water supply, and no problems have been reported.

The need for the plant upgrade came earlier this decade as state regulators tightened screening stan-

dards for such pollutants as giardia and cryptosporidium. The population of the town's water district, however, wasn't enough to support the expense of a new plant, despite higher fees levied on households, and the project was put off for years.

"I came into a little bit of a hornet's nest," said Rachel Lather, a civil engineer for the county charged with fixing the plant and finding the money to do so.

Eventually, the funding surfaced: first \$600,000 came from the state and, this July, \$1.6 million came from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The balance will go toward other water improvements in town. Cemex, which shares the plant's operating costs with the community, chipped in \$50,000.

Construction is expected to be completed by June

"It has been a very difficult number of years," said county Supervisor Neal Coonerty, who spoke at Wednesday's groundbreaking celebration at Pacific Elementary School. "I thank you for the patience, Davenport."