

The Rockford Squire

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'Toilet to tap' concept plugged at plant dedication

It was a regular drink-fest at the sewer treatment plant. On Friday, June 5, residents, staff and township officials past and present were on hand at the new North Kent Sewer Treatment plant to celebrate a formal dedication.

Sewer Authority Board Chairman and Rockford City Manager Michael Young called the day historic and the story courageous.

The plant is the ninth largest of its kind in the entire world, and built from the initiative of five communities. According to Young, it was built with 13,500 cubic yards of concrete, the equivalent of 27 and a half tons which was brought in by 1,500 concrete trucks.

There are 17,000 tons of steel in the plant, the site took in 163,000 yards of sand (the missing hill of the medical mile in Grand Rapids) and a quarter million yards of dirt.

The effluent that the plant produces from the more than four million gallons of sewage it takes in daily is cleaner than the Grand River. It also doesn't taste half bad.

Young declined to taste the liquid, which for a decade he has bragged up as "so clean you literally

could drink it." But many others at the day's ceremony weren't as reluctant.

Plainfield Township Manager Robert Homan was joined with plant manager Larry Campbell for the first swig of the brew, which indeed looked clear if not tasty.

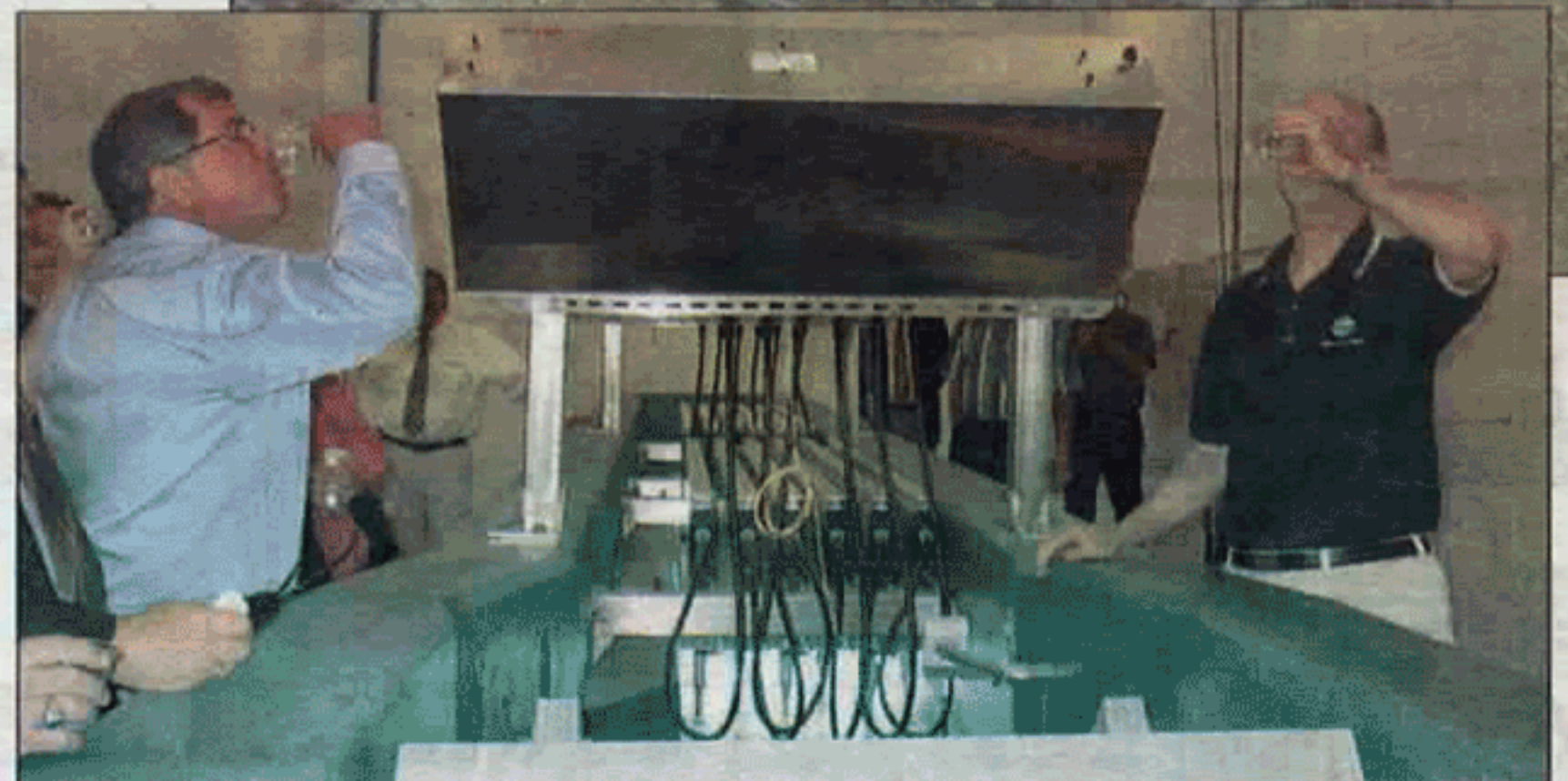
"It's a little funky," Homan reported. Campbell said it was better than some city water he's had.

Homan amazed onlookers by filling his glass up again for another swig. His enthusiasm proved contagious. Former Cannon Township treasurer Dan Barker followed suit with a drink as did State Representative Tom Pearce. Plainfield Township's clerk Scott Harvey downed a glass. *Squire* reporters Cliff Hill and Beth Altena were so caught up in the moment, they drank the treated sewage too.

Campbell said it is almost a shame that the effluent is released into the Grand River because the quality is so good it should be put to use. He said if there was still a golf course close by he'd talk to them about taking advantage of this clean

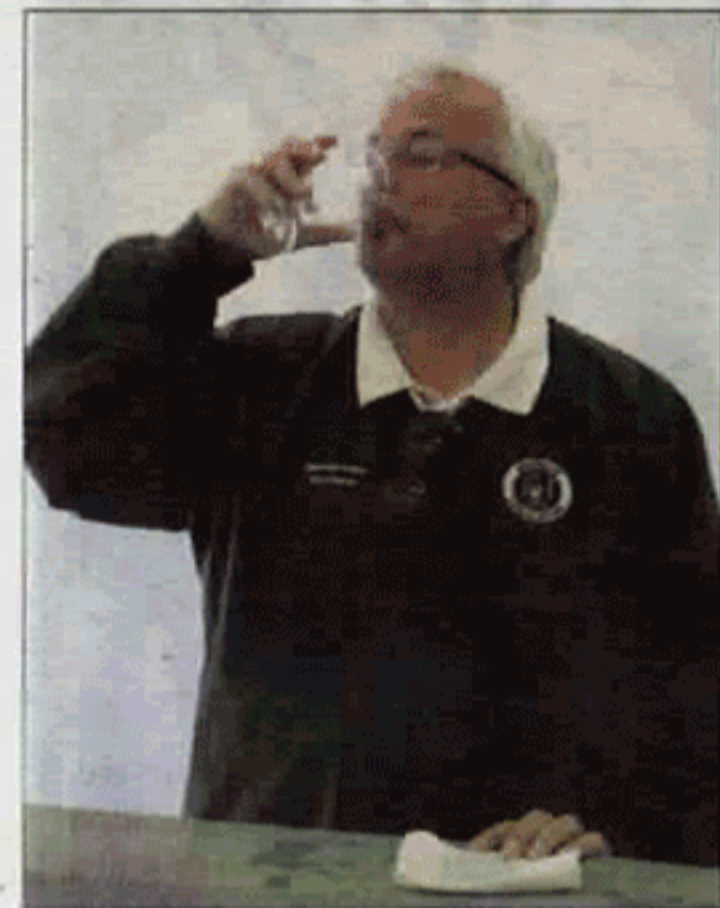
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THEY DRANK WHAT?!— Bubbling sewage part way thought the treatment process cooks down in aerated tanks at the sewer treatment plant on Coit Avenue.



PLANT

From page 1



WHAT YOU DO FOR YOUR VOTERS— Drink effluent. Tom Pearce downed a glass of treated wastewater along with township officials and a variety of other brave individuals. This morning this liquid was in someone's toilet.

water.

"As a country someday we are going to have to come to grips with the concept of 'toilet to tap,'" said Campbell. He said at the high level of treatment this water receives, it wouldn't take much to make it as clean as the water in our faucets and water bottles.

"You could take it one step further and filter it with reverse osmosis and it could be reintroduced in the groundwater system," he said. With growing water issues in the country, Campbell believes it is inevitable that we will eventually be drinking treated wastewater.

With over four million gallons a day entering the plant, the treatment process has to be as quick as it is thorough. According to one of the tour guides (plant staff), from start to finish the wastewater is processed in six to eight hours. That means the product that was tasted following the afternoon ceremony could have been in someone's toilet that morning.

The plant has been ten years in the making, and is a testimony to the cooperative



GROUP EFFORT— Those who were involved in the creation of the North Kent Sewer Authority plant were asked to take part in a ribbon cutting Friday, June 5.

efforts of the five communities who made it possible. The City of Rockford and the townships of Alpine, Cannon, Courtland and Plainfield are represented in the name, the PARCCside Clean Water Plant.

"This is an emotional day. The plant represents a lot of sacrifice," said Young, who said the members on the board have been meeting monthly for ten years—a lot of meetings.

Although sewer rates have gone up for many, Young said increases were less than if the plant had not been built. In fact, it was in response to increases that the decision to build

the plant was made.

Most people will never drink the treated sewage, but should appreciate the environmental benefit to our waterways of this type of new technology.

Homan, who has long stated he would drink a glass of the effluent and probably never expected to be joined by a group of fellow enthusiasts, said he hadn't given much thought to the actual act over the years.

"I understand the technology and know it is safe to drink," he said. "The symbolism of the gesture is what is important."



WRITE THE NEWS OR BE THE NEWS?— In the excitement of the moment it's easy for reporters to cross the line. We thought, 'How can we be here and not be able to say we did it?' Drinking the treated sewage are *Squire* reporters Beth Altena and Cliff Hill.

SOME FUN— Above right is retired treasurer for Cannon Township Dan Barker showing his support for the NKSA with a drink.



THE SOLID PRODUCT— There is a shorter word for this. Along with open tanks of percolating liquid, grated walkways cover the denser solid matter as it makes its way through treatment. It will eventually be compressed into a giant glob—called a slug—with the consistency of silly putty that will go to landfills. There it helps landfill waste decompose faster and releases methane gas, which is used to make electricity.