Innovation flourishes at Bustamante Plant

Even 30 years after operations began, El Paso Water’s Roberto R. Bustamante Wastewater Treatment Plant is still making waves in wastewater treatment.

Bob Bustamante, who served as our assistant general manager at the time, was instrumental in getting the Lower Valley plant built for the growing East Side, which required a larger and more modern wastewater treatment facility.

Named for the enterprising engineer who envisioned the plant, Bob Bustamante recognized the value of reclaimed water as a valuable resource to our city. As the 39-million-gallon-a-day plant treated wastewater for the growing East Side, it also fulfilled our city’s needs for reclaimed water.

New era of projects

Because of Bustamante’s foresight, we ventured into successful water reclamation projects to build a more sustainable water future. We supply water to the nearby Mount Carmel Cemetery and to farmers downstream for irrigation, helping to conserve millions of gallons of drinking water for our residents.

The plant’s treated wastewater also supplies the Rio Bosque Wetlands Preserve, helping to sustain the aquatic habitat for wildlife and native vegetation.

The plant was Bob Bustamante’s final successful project, among many, before his retirement after a 32-year career with our utility. Bustamante, who passed away in June, was truly a groundbreaker in the water and wastewater industry and served as a mentor to many at EPWater, including me.

Staff appreciation

As we mark this anniversary, it’s also important to recognize the dedicated plant operators who have contributed to its success over the years. It’s the mark of a good workplace when retired staff members return to celebrate milestones, as recently occurred. Because of this team effort, the Bustamante Plant has operated as envisioned.

At the time of its opening, the Bustamante plant was billed as state of the art. Assistant Superintendent Jose Rios, one of the plant’s first employees, has seen the plant grow over the years with the population and remembers the excitement surrounding it. But the plant’s days of innovation are far from over.

To keep up with demand, we are investing in the plant to improve its wastewater treatment process and increase the plant’s capacity by an additional 12 million gallons of wastewater per day. This multimillion-dollar project to optimize the plant will extend its lifespan by 30 years and is due for completion by 2026. Upgraded aeration basins will remove more contaminants to produce higher quality reclaimed water. Also, additional primary and secondary clarifiers will be installed, which polish the water after it is biologically treated.

As the East Side continues to grow, so will the importance of the Bustamante Plant, which will soon play another unique role in our community. Its treated wastewater will become source water for the future Advanced Water Purification Facility, which will take water reuse a step further by routing it directly to the tap. Construction is expected to begin within the next two years at the facility, which will be next door.

We happily celebrate the Roberto R. Bustamante Wastewater Treatment Plant’s 30 years of success and look forward to the next era of more exciting things to come.