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WATER

On the Water Front

September 2018 | **A Message from John Balliew, P.E., President/CEO**

75-year-old Canal Plant thrives in Chihuahuita

El Paso Water is truly as great as the people who embody the mission of our utility. No other facility could illustrate this point better than our renowned W.E. Robertson Water Treatment Plant, which is observing its storied 75th anniversary.

EPWater runs a people-centric facility at the “Canal Plant,” affectionately dubbed by its staff and locals. It’s been that way since its inception in 1943. The Canal Plant was the new kid on the block in the historical, modest neighborhood of Chihuahuita, which is in the shadow of the Santa Fe Bridge.



"Water Works" painting by Patrick Gabaldon

Growing by leaps and bounds

The water treatment plant entered the scene at a time of remarkable growth for our border city. El Paso’s population had leaped from 53,000 to 132,000 from 1910 to 1930, according to data from the Texas State Historical Association. Residents faced crime, growth, health and environmental challenges, some linked to water quality and supply. The city was at a crossroads, desperately needing to diversify its water supplies – never mind the fact that Fort Bliss was expanding with World War II underway.

Without expensive investment in new water sources, the city’s underground water supply was estimated to only last 20 years, warned W.E. Robertson, Chairman of the City Water Board. Our utility founding fathers recognized the need to diversify El Paso’s water supply.

City officials signed a contract in Feb. 18, 1941, with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to secure water rights from the Rio Grande through the Elephant Butte Dam and Reservoir. The \$1 million plant boasted new processes developed to produce high-quality water.

The plant was named after Robertson who said his efforts came only as a part of his duty as a citizen in the community.

As EPWater observes the diamond anniversary of the W.E. Robertson Water Treatment Plant, our utility is at a similar junction where our service area is expected to grow to 1.3 million people by 2050, Texas Water Development Board estimates say. Our responsibility is to ensure a sustainable supply of high quality water for future El Pasoans.

Establishing neighborhood ties

As we mark 75 years, we also want to recognize the relationship this plant has had with the Chihuahuita community. Though the development of the facility took over the neighborhood lover’s lane and displaced some tenement homes, residents accepted the new plant with hopes of economic progress and job opportunities, where employees could walk to work.

For 75 years, the plant and its neighbors peacefully coexisted in a community where one was rarely mentioned without the other.

In recognition of the plant’s place in this community for 75 years, EPWater commissioned a painting by El Paso artist Patrick Gabaldon to capture the spirit of the W.E. Robertson Water Treatment Plant in colorful Chihuahuita. In conjunction with the El Paso Community Foundation who will accept payment, we will offer prints for sale, with proceeds to benefit community improvement projects identified by the Chihuahuita Neighborhood Association.

We celebrate our role in this unique, historical community and seek to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to be a good neighbor.



On the Water Front is a publication of El Paso Water.

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