

# Community News

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**GLEAMING:** The historic Walter E. Peele/Dixie water treatment on State Road 7 recently received a \$1.5 million restoration. The plant provides 20 percent of the water for residents in the Fort Lauderdale area. At left, old controls at the plant are still operational. Some have been in use since 1926. Staff photos/Carl Sobert

## It's pure charm

**75-year-old  
Lauderdale  
water plant  
undergoes  
\$1.5 million  
face lift to  
restore its  
old glory.**

By **REBECCA ZIMOGH**  
STAFF WRITER

People have been counting on the Walter E. Peele/Dixie water treatment plant on State Road 7 for 75 years to make their drinking water clean and safe.

Decades ago, before "city water" was available in a sparsely populated western Broward County, Davie, Plantation and other nearby residents would line up with jugs to obtain free drinking water at the Fort Lauderdale utility.

A \$1.5 million renovation at the plant

was completed this month, recovering the old-fashioned architecture and charm not seen at modern bland-looking utilities that serve other communities.

There are still the spigots out front for people to get a free drink.

"They don't build them like they built that one back then," said Greg Kisela, assistant city manager for Fort Lauderdale. "A lot of what you see today is more of an industrial/commercial look."

But the plant, which provides 20

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Sun-Sentinel

## Face lift for Lauderdale water plant

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percent of water to residents in the Fort Lauderdale area, badly needed structural repairs as of June 1999, when the city began the renovation project.

Work focused on preserving the plant's unique history and architecture as much as it did on structural improvements, Kisela said.

"[We] wanted to preserve that portion of the city's history," Kisela said. In 1975, the American Water Works Association designated the Peele/Dixie plant as a landmark. Over the years, the plant has been home to high school proms, cocktail parties and even a few weddings.

Designed in 1926 by Fort Lauderdale architect Francis Abreau, the plant's high Mediterranean ceilings, archways and tile floors attracted many visitors to its "country" location, a few blocks south of Davie Road on State Road 7.

It has also provided courtesy faucets where people could go and collect clean water themselves if it wasn't being supplied to their homes. Tourists with recreation vehicles, residents in trailer parks and others with well water could get soft, fully treated water for free.

Many of the old features were restored during the renovation.

Arched windows lining one hallway were part of the original structure but had been covered up with plaster. They have now been uncovered.

The arch around the front door, along with others on windows and doors, were hand painted to look like marble during the renovation. The building's stucco and tile floors were also redone.

The walls in the plant's entry are hung with portraits of old plant managers and employees, including an oil painting of Walter E. Peele, the utility complex's namesake who helped design the plant. Plaques also commemorate events in the plant's long history.

"Now I look at it as the diamond in the rough," Plant Manager Joe Mackey said.

Along with aesthetics, the working environment was improved by structural changes.

"The guys here were under tough conditions," Mackey said. He said the roof used to leak so much that he needed to bring an umbrella to his office on rainy days.

Now the plant has a new roof, a lightning protection system, a bird deterrent system and new windows and doors. All of these changes make the job of treating 6 million to 8 million gallons of water a day a little easier. The plant's improvements are a step toward revitalizing the community, said neighbors who work in the businesses that surround the plant.

"Ultimately it will really help this whole neighborhood," said Michael Reo, general manager of the pest control office next door.

Frank McGee, a salesperson at the hardware store across the street, said the plant has been "an attribute to the neighborhood," even before the renovation.

"I don't think it looked this good in 1926," Kisela said.