

Gallup looking for water, sanitation director

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Former director Vince Tovar resigns; Matzke now at the helm

Residents around the city won't notice changes in turning on tap water or with flushing their toilets, but there is a top-level employee change connected to Gallup's waste water treatment plant.

City Human Resources Director Klo Abeita confirmed April 19 that Vince Tovar, former city executive director of water and sanitation, resigned the job Feb. 26. The city remains in the hunt for a qualified person to replace Tovar, officials said.

"I am leaving to pursue other opportunities and challenges," Tovar wrote in a one-page resignation letter to City Manager Maryann Ustick. "The highlight of my tenure with the city was the participation in the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project, a true world class undertaking."

Tovar began working the \$105,000 annual job in July 2014, Abeita said. Tovar's starting salary was \$100,000, Abeita said.

"We are currently advertising (the job) and the city would like (to hire) someone as soon as possible after the closing date for the advertisement," she said.

Abeita said Gallup Electric Director Richard Matzke has assumed Tovar's old duties. Matzke's annual salary totals about \$105,000, but he said April 20 that he isn't receiving any additional

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salary while doing Tovar's old job duties.

"I'm not getting anything extra," Matzke said. "We hope to have somebody in place soon."

The city has gone through its share of ups and downs over the years regarding water and sanitation matters as they relate to the waste water treatment plant.

The plant operates at maximum capacity, handling upward of 800,000 gallons of treated water on a daily basis, city officials have said.

Folks who live and work near the plant on Gallup's west side often complain about the foul odor that emanates from the plant and city officials have not ruled out the construction of another bigger plant on Gallup's east end.

Making matters worse is the fact that there are several hotels and motels and restaurants located within a stone's throw of the plant and city officials have argued that the plant stymies tourism.

Severn Trent Environmental Services, a Pennsylvania-based management firm, has been assisting the city for a little more than five years and at a rate of \$1.1 million annually to control things like odor and to provide help with residential and business complaints.

The estimated \$1 billion Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project referred to by Tovar in the resignation letter is an ongoing project that'll ultimately bring water from the San Juan River to the eastern portions of the Navajo Nation and Gallup.

Abeita noted that the water and sanitation executive directorship job will remain open until filled.

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