

Gallup hires new wastewater plant director

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 15 July 2016 00:44



Can new hire keep the plant's foul smell under wraps?

After a months-long national search, the city of Gallup has hired a new wastewater and solid waste director. City Manager Maryann Ustick made the announcement at the end of the July 12 city council meeting.

Dennis Romero is the new guy in what may be the most thankless job at the city. The plant has been the target of numerous citizen complaints over the years for the foul odors that have made some hotel, motel, and restaurant owners on Gallup's west side unhappy. But lately, the smell isn't so apparent.

"I haven't received a negative complaint in a long time," Councilwoman Fran Palochak said. Polachak's District 4 includes the location of the plant. "I think everyone on that side of town is pleased with that."

Former Water and Sanitation Director Vince Tovar resigned from the plant job about six months ago. Tovar held the job for about two years. The city did not formally announce Tovar's departure.

"Water, wastewater, and solid waste services will greatly benefit from the dedicated role and expertise of our new director," Ustick said from a prepared statement. "[Romero] brings the experience and leadership necessary to help us continue the progress made under the previous director to provide professional, data-driven, and customer-focused utility services."

Gallup hires new wastewater plant director

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 15 July 2016 00:44

Gallup Human Resources Director Klo Abeita said Romero's annual salary is \$90,000, with the job beginning July 25. A request for Romero's resume went unanswered by Abeita as of press time, along with a request to speak directly with Romero.

Ustick said Romero's responsibilities include the managing of the city's water, wastewater, and solid-waste services. He will also oversee the maintenance, contracting, and capital planning at the plant, Ustick said. Romero will have a central role with respect to the near \$1-billion Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project. The Water Supply Project has been in focus for more than two decades, and when completed, it will bring water from the San Juan River to Gallup and the eastern parts of the Navajo Nation.

Prior to the Gallup job, Romero was the water, wastewater, and gas engineering bureau chief for the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission in Santa Fe. He was a project manager for the Santa Fe Public Works Department, where he managed the design, procurement, construction, acceptance, and closeout for water resources and utilities.

City Electric Director Richard Matzke served as Gallup's wastewater director prior to the arrival of Romero. He was thanked by city officials at the meeting.

"Richard has done an excellent job overseeing the water and wastewater and solid waste department while we looked for someone to permanently fill the position," Mayor Jackie McKinney said. "Richard's extensive experience in city operations and implementing technology for sustainability and efficiency provided a strong foundation for [Romero] to continue our efforts to improve operations and services to our customers."

A native of New Mexico and a U.S. Navy veteran, Romero has an undergraduate degree in civil engineering from the University of New Mexico and a graduate degree in geochemistry from New Mexico Tech.

By Bernie Dotson
Sun Correspondent