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75th anniversary of Kingsley Dam (continued from p. 1)

Their labors produced one of the largest public works projects in Nebraska’s history, a project that drew upon the initiative and foresight of those irrigation pioneers who saw a prosperous future for Nebraska in the development and beneficial use of the state’s water resources.

The Keith County newspaper covered the event thoroughly; the enthusiastic and colorful prose reflected the excitement and optimism engendered by the new dam. The reporter wrote: “Kingsley Dam is officially, formally dedicated to the dam. The dam was closed and storage of water had begun, but it was the first time in the history of Nebraska that 2,000 gathered in 100 degrees of heat to cast their blessings on a great pile of sand and gravel — which was once their bitterest enemy.”

“For generations, the people of Nebraska have sworn a vengeance on the dirt and sand that filled the air, blotted out the sun and eventually laid itself over the fertile farm lands to choke vegetation to death.

“So, seven miles north of Ogallala Tuesday afternoon, a memorable event for Nebraska took place. On that hot summer day, people from every corner of Nebraska gathered to congratulate themselves. At last they had turned a terrible liability into a great asset. They had harnessed the sand and gravel that for all times past had wreaked havoc on the state of Nebraska.

“The people of Nebraska, through the intelligence of civil engineers and the benevolence of a federal government whose treasury has a seemingly bottomless pit, have made use of their enemy — dirt — to hold back the water that has been running away unused since time began. Keith County is serving as a fine reservoir to hold this once-wasted water.”

This summer The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District will rededicate Kingsley Dam on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its completion. A series of events and activities for the public and planned in cooperation with the Ogallala/Keith County Chamber of Commerce and the Keith County Visitors Bureau will be held at Lake McConaughy on July 22 and 23.

Details of the events — which will include a free BBQ for the public, a boat parade, sand volleyball tournament, kayaking and paddleboarding, and much more — are still in the planning stages, but will be made available as they develop.

On the Lakefront

Central will begin a dredging project at Jeffrey Lake in early May to remove a large amount of sediment that has accumulated in the lake over the years. The project will result in significant improvements for recreation, aquatic habitat and hydropower operations.

Central has leased a dredge specifically designed to remove the sediment. The material will be pumped through a floating pipeline over the dam and deposited inside a containment structure on Central-owned land and a parcel owned by Ward David of Lubbock, Tex. Mr. David agreed to temporarily lease the property to Central for the project.

Due to the presence of the dredge and the pipeline, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s public boat ramp on the northeast side of the lake will be out of service for about three months while the project is underway.

However, to facilitate recreational use of the lake on the Memorial Day and 4th of July weekends, dredging will be halted and the ramp opened for public use on those two weekends.

Gothenburg Division Manager Kevin Boyd, who is overseeing the project, said, “Central regrets any inconvenience while dredging is underway, but it will result in significant improvements to recreational opportunities at Jeffrey Lake.”

Central is planning to hire a consultant to conduct a feasibility study to develop alternatives to enhance the residential, commercial and recreational opportunities in the Bullhead Point/Bossung Lake area at Johnson Lake.

Pending receipt of acceptable proposals, Central’s board of directors plans to award the bid at its July board meeting.

This summer’s tours of Central’s hydro-irrigation project for residents of Johnson Lake/Plum Creek Canyon have been scheduled on the following dates:

Fri., June 3; Fri., June 24; Thurs., June 30; and Fri., July 15.

The tours depart from the Johnson EMS building at 7 a.m., and return at about 5 p.m. Central will provide transportation and lunch at Ole’s Big Game Bar & Grill in Paxton.

Tour stops include the Water Interpretive Center at Lake McConaughy, the lake’s outlet structures, Kingsley Hydroplant and the North Platte Diversion Dam.

Reservations — on a first-come, first-served basis — can be made by calling Holly Rahmann at 308-995-3560.

Kingsley and McConaughy: The men behind the names

Central’s board of directors voted in July, 1937 to name the dam that would be completed in 1941 after George P. Kingsley, one of the original and most influential advocates for the irrigation project.

According to a Hastings Tribune article that announced the decision, “He piloted the movement through its most discouraging stages, never faltering in the face of almost unsurmountable obstacles and donating constantly to the funds which were required for its promotion.

“Countless trips to Washington and the state capital, meetings without number and unceasing labor with scientists, technical persons, industrial leaders and others who had a part in shaping the project (and public opinion) — were all part of Kingsley’s contribution.”

Kingsley died in 1929, long before others carried his dream to fruition, but his tireless efforts from 1913 until his death helped keep prospects for the project alive.

Charles W. McConaughy is credited with the idea that evolved into the irrigation project.

“Tri-County Project.”

In one of his first speeches (ca. 1914) to promote the irrigation project, McConaughy said:

“When I have stood and seen for weeks great volumes of water rolling down the Platte in the flood season… and when I have seen the semi-arid lands in our counties suffering and thirsting for water during the crop-growing season, my heart has been set on fire with a vision. I have a vision of what Nebraska can be and ought to be if a combined effort (to build an irrigation project) were made by all of its citizens.”

Although others before him had built canals to irrigate Nebraska lands, none were as ambitious, nor did they

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75th anniversary of Kingsley Dam (continued from p. 1)

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