

Kye Bay celebrates new sewer and water system

By Jim Amos
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Kye Bay residents were flushed with a feeling of satisfaction Saturday.

That's when the tiny community officially celebrated its new water and sewer system, a project that began about 20 years ago.

"It's a celebration and thank you to everybody that worked to make it happen," Martin Crilly, chair of the Kye Bay Clean-up committee, said during an informal weekend get-together.

Twenty years ago, residents of Kye Bay began worrying about the situation in the community stretched out along the ocean below CFB Comox. It wasn't so much a sewage issue then, but one of water.

Many of Kye Bay's lots are small and drinking wells many of them shallow - and septic fields were literally side by side. Some residents put up \$10,000 and exploratory drilling was done to see if a community well could be built. "Clean water

was the issue," Crilly said, noting a sewage system was "not in our wildest dreams."

There were still pit toilets on some properties in the mid '80s."

The money ran out before an adequate water supply could be found.

But the worry didn't go away.

It was not until the mid '90s when money from the regional district, Environment Canada

and the province was found to complete an environmental study.

That study, over the winter of 1994-95, found "real contamination of wells and the foreshore."

The community was red flagged by health officials, preventing property owners from doing any improvements that would increase the pressure on over-taxed septic fields.

Even with the will, money and project design in place, things didn't go according to plan.

Construction on the project, which began last August, was repeatedly interrupted as workers uncovered a number of middens,



Kye Bay resident Bruce McPhee is ready to flush now that the community has a water and sewer system.

New construction was banned because septic field permits could not be obtained.

Health officials said the community had to come up with a solution for a community sewage system. At the same time, new septic system regulations came into place. "It was a double whammy," Crilly said, made even worse as Kye Bay became caught in "a thicket" of bureaucratic and political confusion. It was now the late '90s, and the situation seemed insurmountable, he said.

Determined to fix the problem, some residents put up the money to buy a used sewage treatment plant. On legal grounds, they were denied a permit to connect it to the huge outflow pipe that serves Courtenay and Comox. With not a little irony, Crilly notes that the outflow pipe is "within site of Kye Bay."

The community's luck began to change about three years ago, when a new federal-provincial program made grants available to pay two-thirds of the cost of infrastructure projects, such as a sewer and water system. Secondly, the local medical health officer wrote a letter urging authorities to solve the jurisdictional problems. Thirdly, the Town of Comox said it would welcome Kye Bay into its boundaries as a way to solve the problem that no area outside Comox or Courtenay could connect to the valley's water and waste treatment system.

Even with the infrastructure grant, (which was approved in the spring of 2002), Kye Bay residents knew they would face huge bills to help build the system. Becoming part of Comox also meant higher property taxes.

Last year, the residents "bit the bullet," voting overwhelmingly (80% in favor) to join the town. It was estimated then that each of the 76 property owners would be billed up to \$13,800 towards capital costs of the sewer and water system, plus about \$2,000 for hookups to their home. There would also be costs to decommission septic fields.

Kye Bay celebrates new water, sewer lines



A Comox fire truck sprays a curtain of water over the beach off Kye Bay in a demonstration of the community's new fire-fighting capabilities. The event was part of Saturday's celebration of Kye Bay's new water and sewer system.



Comox firefighter Dave Boylan cranks open a hydrant in Kye Bay during Saturday's celebration of the community's new water and sewer system.

archaeological sites indicating First Nation gathering spots. Each had to be examined by provincial authorities and permission received from the First Nations for work to continue.

It took one year and three days for the relatively simple construction project to be complete. It was only last Wednesday that residents had the ability to hook into a working sewage and water system. They also have the comfort of knowing that, should there be a fire, hydrants are now within feet of most homes.

Crilly figures that about 20 homes are now hooked up and attention will now turn to the long-term clean-up of the ocean off Kye Bay. While safe for swimming, the waters are polluted from septic run-off. Someday, residents hope to be able to walk to the shoreline and, once again, harvest clean shellfish.

Area B director Barbara Price, who lost part of her constituency when Kye Bay joined Comox, said she was "delighted" by the community's success.

"There were quite a few roadblocks and the people were pretty patient. The end result is something they can be proud of," she said.