The grand opening of Wasauksing First Nation’s new water supply, treatment and distribution system, “Wen Shi Shing Biish Wigwaaming,” on October 18, 2012, was an important day in the history of the community.

Wasauksing First Nation (formerly Parry Island First Nation) is located on a 77 km² island in Georgian Bay, just south of Parry Sound, Ontario. With 126 km of lakeshore, Parry Island is one of the larger islands in the Great Lakes. The Wasauksing community on the island consists of approximately 1,073 band members, with 379 living on the reserve.

Community leaders and staff have worked hard to ensure their infrastructure is able to service residents for present and future growth demands. Ensuring safe, clean water has been a very important issue, as the community had been living under a boil–water advisory for 10 years.

Finally, in 2010, the federal government announced an initiative to improve water access in First Nations communities. This enabled Wasauksing to apply for and receive the necessary funding to design and construct a water treatment system that would extract, cleanse, distribute and store fresh water from Georgian Bay. The system consists of water mains, a treatment facility and a storage tower.

To be able to provide clean potable water to our community members for generations to come is a big source of pride for Wasauksing.

Detailed design and contract administration services for this $16.6-million project were provided by First Nations Engineering Services Ltd. (FNESL), a 100% aboriginal-owned engineering company. In the fall of 2010, FNESL tendered the design-build of the composite elevated storage reservoir. The documents specified both a welded painted tank and a glass-fused-to-steel tank. Tender specifications for the elevated storage reservoir included:

- 7.3m x 36.6m concrete pedestal, with 300 mm walls
- 11.0m x 10.4m glass-fused-to-steel tank — insulated and cladded
- Tank piping
- Geodesic dome
- Mobilization and demobilization

Environmental protection, including fencing, rip rap, rock excavation, etc.
- Site works, including site preparation and grading, granular drive and parking area, final site works
- Pedestal to include valve and chemical injection rooms

Greatario Industrial Storage Systems submitted its bid as a general contractor. The company’s experience working with First Nations communities and FNESL gave it an in-depth understanding of the project details and expectations. Specifications for the tank were very similar to a recent project Greatario was involved with for Henvey Inlet First Nations.

In February 2011, Greatario was awarded the Wasauksing project as general contractor, to design-build the elevated storage reservoir and also construct the pedestal base. The company finalized all design drawings and began pedestal construction in March 2011.

Angus MacAlister, Greatario’s project manager, worked closely with the Wasauksing and FNESL team to ensure the construction met everyone’s expectations and was completed in a timely manner. In addition to Greatario’s trained building crew, local labour and contractors were involved with the project.

“The local contractors were a great
asset to our team. Understanding the local culture and weather conditions enabled us to accomplish the project within the First Nation guidelines,” says McAlister. Final insulation and cladding of the tank were completed, when warmer weather arrived in the spring.

This new drinking water treatment and distribution system consists of a new raw-water intake and low-lift pumping station, water treatment plant, featuring slow-sand filtration with ozonation pre-treatment, UV and chemical disinfection, SCADA system, elevated storage reservoir and heated storage building to house a new water delivery truck.

The system services 114 homes, an elders’ complex, day care centre, school, health centre and administration offices. In addition to providing safe drinking water, the new distribution system includes hydrants for added fire protection within the community as well as cisterns for 33 homes unable to be serviced by the core water main.

Ryan Tabobondung, director of public works for Wasauksing First Nation, says: “The members and leadership of Wasauksing are thankful and honoured to have the opportunity to work with the federal government (AANDC) on this project. To be able to provide clean portable water to our community members for generations to come is a big source of pride for Wasauksing. The employment and various economic offshoots this project has created will benefit the community for many years.”

For more information,
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