Oneidas pay $40,000 for water pump

Nation, which almost had resort water shut off, uses more than town guarantees.

By Glenn Coin
Staff writer

The Oneida Indian Nation blinked Tuesday, writing a $40,000 check just before the 5 p.m. deadline set by Verona to shut off water to the nation's Turning Stone Resort and Casino.

Town officials had threatened to halt the water if the nation didn't pay for a pump needed to keep enough water in Verona's tower for emergencies. The nation is using four times as much water as is guaranteed under a contract with the town, depleting storage in the tank, said town Supervisor Dave Reed.

"If there was a fire we would be out of water in 90 minutes," Reed said Tuesday afternoon.

A nation lawyer handed the check to the town's lawyer late Tuesday afternoon, Reed said.

If the nation had not paid by 5 p.m., Reed said, Verona was prepared to shut off the water to the resort for the rest of Tuesday. On each day after that, he said, the town would have opened the valve just long enough to supply the nation with 150,000 gallons per day. That's the amount guaranteed under a contract with the town.

The nation uses about 600,000 gallons a day now, Reed said. The water tower near the resort, paid for by the nation and given to the town in 1997, holds 1 million gallons.

Reed said he has been telling nation officials since January that a pump would be needed this year as the resort and the nation's water needs grew. Without the pump, Reed said, the town's water tank can't be filled high enough to guarantee water for the resort and town residents while keeping enough for emergencies. On July 26, he said, he wrote a letter to the nation setting Tuesday's deadline.

"The people of Verona don't have a water problem. The nation has a water problem," Reed said. "I have a legal and moral obligation to protect the integrity of our water district."

Nation spokesman Mark Emery said nation engineers and lawyers have been working with the town.

"I certainly wouldn't say we were dragging our feet," Emery said. "These issues take time to work out."

The $40,000 will pay to rent a pump until a permanent pump can be built. Reed said the pump should be shipped from New Jersey this week and could be operating by Friday.

The permanent pump and pumphouse will cost about $300,000, Reed said, and will take several months to design and build.

Water for the resort comes from the Oneida city reservoir in the Oneida County town of Annsville. The nation is guaranteed 150,000 gallons a day, but can buy more as long as Oneida's system can provide it, said Art Smolinski, the city's water superintendent.

Water flows downhill from the reservoir into the Verona water tower. Because of the elevation drop from the reservoir to the tower, however, gravity only fills the tank about halfway. A pump would fill it to the top, Reed said.

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