

People **Informing** People



THE HAWK EYE

Ceremony at dam marks new phase of lake project.

By JEFF ABELL

jabell@thehawkeye.com

With the turn of a crank, a dream fueled by decades of hard work and tireless determination became a reality.

In a brief ceremony Monday, more than two dozen people braved the bitter cold to celebrate the completion of a 50-foot earth-fill dam that will divert stormwater into a 178-acre manmade lake at the Big Hollow Recreation Area near Sperry.

Des Moines County Conservation Board member Dave Riley recounted the history of the lake project, which dates back to 1964. He said the project could not have been completed without the support of county residents.

County Board of Supervisors member Bob Beck echoed that sentiment.

"I can't begin to count all the people and all the supervisors who have pushed this project along," he said. "This will be a great asset to southeast Iowa."

Jeff Bergman, who recently retired as county conservation director, was given the honor of being the first person to turn the crank that closes the dam's water gate. Other local dignitaries followed.

Riley credited Bergman with championing the lake project during his 35-year tenure with the county. In turn, Bergman praised the work of others.

Despite obstacles, such as bureaucratic red tape and the shortsightedness of critics, Bergman said the lake project begins a new phase with the completion of the dam.

The price tag for the dam came in at about \$1 million, about \$300,000 less than expected. The cost for the entire lake project is estimated at \$3 million, with \$1 million coming from Vision Iowa funds.

So far, more than \$2 million has been raised through private donations and grants.

The lake project was delayed for three years to allow a team of archaeologists to unearth cultural artifacts from a section of the recreation area west of U.S. 61 and south of Mediapolis.

The archaeology dig cost the county about \$209,000.

Construction of the 700-foot-long embankment dam began last December. However, heavy rainfall that spurred flooding in June and September caused a three-month delay in the completion of the project.

Crews from Iowa-based DeLong Construction moved an average of 8,000 cubic feet of soil daily to construct the dam.

Big Hollow, west of U.S. 61 and south of Mediapolis, currently has picnic grounds, gun and archery shooting ranges, an observatory complex and hiking trails.

Once the lake is filled, the park will feature a fully stocked lake dotted with campsites, cabins, swimming beaches and hunting areas across about 800 acres. It could take up to three years to fill the lake, which will be more than 50 feet at its deepest point.

"This is a great day for the county," conservation director Kim Perlstein said. "There are big things to come."