

## West Wabasso may get county water in time for Christmas

By HENRY A. STEPHENS

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — Residents of West Wabasso may get a long-awaited present for Christmas — clean water.

Leroy Wise, a plumbing subcontractor from Okeechobee, said Wednesday he is testing about 60 homes in the neighborhood northwest of Vero Beach to see whether their pipes can take the pressure of the county's water system.

"We have to make sure they can take 65 pounds (per square inch)," he said. "We have tested 20 so far."

Some of them, he said, need repairs before they can accept county water. He said he would advise Project Manager Himanshu Mehta of the needed repairs.

Wise said he expects to have testing on the remaining homes finished late next week.

"We're calling people to schedule tests, but some don't even have phones," he said. "So sometimes we have to go door to door."

After any repairs are completed, he said, he expects to start laying trenches and connecting homes to the new water lines in December.

"Himanshu told folks this would be coming by Christmas, and that's what we're going to do," he said.

Wise said he recently took a sample from one resident's well and couldn't believe people had to deal with such brown water.

West Wabasso residents have put up with their well water, the color of pale tea, for years. Most residents say they buy bottled water for drinking, but some say they use the well water for washing.

The water from private wells has 10 times the acceptable level of iron, county Environmental Health Specialist Julianne Price says.

West Wabasso, north of County Road 510 and between 61st Drive and 66th Avenue, has surprised many visitors with — until recently — a lack of sidewalks, streetlights or paved roads, a stark contrast from the rest of the county's high quality of life, Price says.

She said Wednesday she was amazed by the progress in the water project, ever since the County Commission in May awarded a \$575,000 contract to Sheltra & Son Construction Co. Inc. of Indiantown. The company recently finished laying more than 7,200 feet of water mains and installing eight fire hydrants in West Wabasso.

Wise is working on a \$69,000 plumbing subcontract with Sheltra.

"We were just inching along for years, and then 'Bam!' This really took off," Price said.

Mehta said samples from the water mains have come back free of harmful bacteria, adding he next has to record this with the Orlando office of the state Department of Environmental Protection before the homes can be connected.

County officials launched the water project in May using an \$825,000 federal block grant.

### WATER LINES

- The county's \$825,000 block grant covers the construction of 7,200 feet of water mains in west Wabasso, the installation of eight fire hydrants and covers the \$130-per-customer charge to install 123 water meters.
- The County Commission in October 2005 advanced \$102,700 to cover fees for starting service.
- This leaves the customer paying \$50 each — plus the monthly water bill.