

CELEBRATION BEGINS AT 10 A.M. TOMORROW AT THE DAM

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The Center Hill Lake and Dam project sure has come a long way since its **initial construction contract was awarded in 1942**. In fact, the 50th anniversary celebration of the project's completion is set for 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. tomorrow at the dam. A special invitation has been extended to construction workers who helped build the dam, **US Army Corps of Engineers Ranger Mark Herd** said, and visitors to the dam will have a chance to ask those workers questions at tomorrow's celebration.

"Tomorrow's celebration is important because it will provide a rare opportunity for members of the community to speak with these construction workers," he said. "In another 50 years, it will definitely be too late to talk to them."

A video in which former dam construction workers Kenneth Pullum and Earl Agee, both of the Baxter area, recall their experiences working on the project will also be featured at the celebration, Herd said.

"I was involved in the construction of the dam virtually from beginning to end, and so was Earl," Pullum told the Herald-Citizen. "It lasted from 1942 to 1948, but construction was halted for about two years during World War II for lack of steel. That's why the construction took so long."

Although the dam itself has some steel in it, Pullum said, the majority of it was used to build the powerhouse.

The dam itself is considered a combination earth and concrete gravity structure, Herd explained.

It stretches 2,160 feet in length and is 240 feet high from its lowest foundation.

Land purchases for the project began in 1942, authorized by Congress under the Flood Control Act of 1938. Initial cost for construction was \$44.3 million.

But the sale of hydropower and dollars spent for recreational use at the lake has more than repaid the cost of the dam's construction, Herd said.

In fact, \$2.1 million was generated from the sale of Center Hill's hydropower and \$111 million were spent by the public for recreational purposes last year alone.

Approximately five million people visit Center Hill Lake's nine Corps recreation areas, three state parks and eight commercial marinas annually.

Although recreation is now a major factor in the operation and management of the lake, Pullum said the dam's construction could sometimes get to be grueling work.

"There were about four people killed while they were working on the dam's construction," he said. "Two fell, one was killed when a big rock fell from a bluff and hit him and another was killed when a rim blew out of a tire and hit him."

But even though the work was difficult, Pullum said he plans to be on hand at tomorrow's event to celebrate the achievement he was a part of.

Tours of the power plant will be conducted by Corps of Engineers employees at 9 a.m. and again at noon.

A special anniversary ceremony will begin at 10 a.m. with DeKalb County High School band member Amanda Winchester performing the National Anthem and a presentation of flags by the 278th Regional Armored Cavalry Regiment Headquarters at Cookeville.

Cookeville's Country Giant radio personality Philip Gibbons will serve as the event's master of ceremonies, and Lt. Col. Christopher Young, commander of the Nashville District of the Corps of Engineers, will be the keynote speaker.

Other speakers will include retired DeKalb County teacher **Jane McGuinnis** and Gordonsville mayor **Joe Anderson**.

To get to Center Hill Dam from Cookeville, take Interstate 40 west to Exit 268 and make a left onto Highway 96. When Highway 96 intersects with Highway 141, make a right. This road will take motorists across the top of the dam.

For more information about the event call Center Hill Dam at (931) 858-3125 or (615) 548-4521.



Displaying the Center Hill Lake and Dam project's 50th anniversary painting are, from left, Power Plant Supt. Olga Beddingfield and US Army Corps of Engineers Ranger Mark Herd. * H-C Photo: Ty Kernea

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