

Flatwoods celebrates new water system

KEITH STRANGE / Staff Writer

**Members of the Flatwoods community joined legislators and other dignitaries Friday to cut the ribbon on a \$2 million extension that will supply water to more than 80 homes. Pictured, from left, are Scott County Supervisor Larry Vicars, Paula Hylton of the Lane Group, Flatwoods resident Walter Rose, Joy Rumley of the Department of Housing and Community Development, Coeburn Town Manager Loretta Mays, Coeburn Mayor G. Lynn Wells, Wise County Supervisor Robby Robbins, state Sen. Phillip Puckett, Danny Buchanan of the Wise County Public Service Authority and Lenowisco Planning District Executive Director Ron Flanary. (Keith Strange photo)**

FLATWOODS — More than 80 homes in this community near Coeburn now have access to much-needed public water.

Dozens of members of the Flatwoods community joined legislators and public officials Friday to celebrate the ribbon-cutting on a \$1.2 million water line extension.

It was a moment years in the making.

Water provided by Coeburn will serve 82 households and 188 residents, 78 percent of whom qualify as low-to-moderate income.

Coeburn Town Manager Loretta Mays said the investment will provide safe drinking water to residents who had been struggling since their wells and springs ran dry during this summer's drought.

Mays said that even for the residents who were lucky enough to have access to water, many were forced to drink poor-quality water.

"They've been looking for a water supply for years, and a project like this means the world to the residents of this community," she said. "These people didn't have many directions to turn and a project like this shows our leaders are trying to give us a helping hand."

It's a helping hand that will not go unappreciated.

"It just means so much to us out here," said Flatwoods resident Lee Stallard. "Wells go dry, springs go dry, and I can't remember when we've had a drier fall."

Stallard said the situation was becoming critical for many residents who didn't have water at their homes.

"I have friends who've been hauling water from nearby towns," he said. "We used to have to go all the way to Scott County to get water.

"You don't understand just how much we appreciate this help."

"Several years ago, if this had happened we'd have been in serious trouble," Lenowisco Planning District Executive Director Ron Flanary said of the drought. "But thanks to a lot of hard work and a lot of cooperation from a lot of individuals, we're able to provide water to this community."

State Sen. Phillip Puckett told the assembled crowd the extension was an example of neighbors helping neighbors.

"This is an issue that's touched nearly every community in Southwest Virginia," he said. "We all need clean, safe drinking water for our citizens and our future quality of life."

Coeburn Mayor G. Lynn Wells said that while many consider water a given, a water shortage is a critical issue.

"Hopefully we will now be able to bring water to everyone in our community who wants it," he said. "We really needed water, and God sent this opportunity our way to be able to provide it."

Resident Walter Rose, who had both a well and spring go dry, agreed.

"This is truly a blessing," he said.

Funding for the project was provided by a \$1 million-dollar state community development block grant, with an additional \$213,123 provided by the Southwest Virginia Water/Wastewater Construction Fund and a \$40,000 grant by the Lenowisco Planning District. An additional \$39,600 was allocated in the form of waived connection fees.