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Celebrating 30th reunion

Members of the Jamestown class of 1977 at North Kingstown High School celebrated their 30th reunion at the Quonset Officers Club in July. At rear, from left, are Dave McCarthy, Barry Walsh, Deb Pritchard, Sue Quinn. In front are Bill Kraut, Cindy Hoffman, Carol Caswell, Judy Lucas and Cathie Welch.

Town cited for sewer discharge problems

By Dotti Farrington

Jamestown is one of six Rhode Island communities ordered Aug. 10 by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to take steps to stop harmful raw sewage from discharging from municipal pipes and wastewater systems into state waterways.

Town Administrator Bruce Keiser said Tuesday that the orders reflect illegal house sump pumps, poor practices of disposal of grease by downtown food establishments and deficiencies at the wastewater treatment plant. He said the town is working to correct all those problems.

Letters were sent some weeks ago to all users of the sewer system, seeking their cooperation before further enforcement is tried, he said. The town is working with downtown merchants to notify and help them resolve the grease disposal that creates blockages and causes pipes to overflow, Keiser reported. He said the multi-million dollar rehabilitation work at the treatment plant is proceeding on schedule.

Keiser said EPA officials acknowledged that Jamestown is working to resolve all aspects of the sewage discharges but explained that they must enforce their regulations as aggressively as they are doing in order to be effective. Keiser said no fines are involved in the orders. He said the

only additional step the town has to take is to report the progress of the measures it is already taking.

The EPA advised the town that it has been documenting the overflows since 2002, according to the town administrator. The town began planning pipe projects and the plant renovations in the mid-1990s, according to town records.

The orders are part of a coordinated effort by the EPA and the state Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to end serious water quality problems caused by overflows.

The EPA administrative orders were issued to East Greenwich, Narragansett, Warwick, West Warwick and Woonsocket, as well as Jamestown. The orders are part of a broader strategy to reduce sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) by enforcing existing regulations and by increasing assistance to help municipalities take necessary steps to address their SSO problems.

Robert Varney, regional administrator of the EPA's New England office, said the stepped up work is meant to help communities protect the Ocean State's coastal beaches, shellfishing areas and fresh water resources.

The EPA last February issued such orders about overflows to the Narragansett Bay Commission and Providence, Barrington,

Smithfield, Cranston and Bristol.

The EPA said SSOs are caused by breakdowns in the system of pipes, pumps and other equipment that municipalities employ. Unlawful discharges are often a result of grease and other blockages; structural, mechanical or electrical failures; or from excess flows that enter wastewater collection systems.

The last time Jamestown had an overflow from its treatment plant aeration tanks was in April due to heavy rains, combined with infiltration of rainwater into pipes bringing much greater volumes of water than the plant can handle.

When a SSO occurs, raw sewage is released from the wastewater collection system directly to surface waters or onto streets, where it poses a direct public health risk, the EPA said. Discharges of untreated sewage from SSOs are a significant cause of the water quality violations that cause beach and shellfish closures in New England, according to the EPA. Overflows also back up into homes and other buildings, posing health risks and causing property damage.

The EPA, which reported about 40,000 overflows throughout the country last year, issues orders requiring systems with overflow problems to conduct assessments and fix problems in the systems.

Volunteers are needed to help with young children

Child and Family Services has an ideal volunteer opportunity for anyone who loves spending time with small children. Help is especially needed between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. The children range in age from 6 weeks to 5 years and welcome the extra attention that a volunteer can give.

There are opportunities at both the Newport and Middletown sites. Volunteers must be at least 14 years of age and able to give a minimum of three hours a week. For more information, call the volunteer office at 848-4210.