

Golden Queen Mine could produce gold in February

Jill Barnes Nelson, Tehachapi News, 1-8-16

The Golden Queen Mining Company in Mojave has announced it has almost completed all its construction needs and is getting closer to actually mining for gold and silver.

A newsletter sent Jan. 4 stated the mining company has finished about 95 percent of the project's construction. It also stated it is on schedule to do the inaugural gold pour, probably in February.

“Commissioning activities have commenced and the first ore has been fed through the crushing circuit,” the newsletter states. “The crushing-screening plant commenced in November and continued through early December. Full power was provided to the project on Dec. 4.”

It also said ore stockpiling is ongoing and leaching is anticipated to begin in mid-January with the first gold production targeted for early February.

The plant now has 91 full-time employees in Mojave and all of the senior management positions have been filled, the statement said.

“We have almost completed construction, and I am proud of the progress that our team has made over the past 24 months,” said Thomas M. Clay, chairman and interim CEO, in the release. “I would like to thank all of our employees and contractors for their dedication and commitment. The first gold pour is expected to occur in February and will signify a new chapter in Golden Queen's long history as we transition from development to production.”

It's been decades since any of the precious metals were extracted from the mine. The Golden Queen Mine was first operational in the early 1900s, but the gold and silver production stopped during World War II. Low gold prices after the war kept it closed. Rising gold prices led to a push to reopen the mine.

The mine received state operating permits in 2012. Work on the infrastructure for the open-pit mine has been ongoing for the past two years.

The Golden Queen Mining Company is an open pit, heap leach operation just south of the town of Mojave. The mining operation is not like those shown on television shows like “Gold Rush,” where a sluicing process is used. The extraction will be done by crushing tons of rock, then treating it with a cyanide solution to extract the gold and silver into a leach pad area.

Workers will collect ore in the pits, using a heap leach process to extract gold and silver. The ore then is ground into small pieces, which are piled in a pit and soaked with a cyanide solution to extract the gold and silver.

Once the area for the pad was cleared and the surface smoothed, a 12-inch layer of clay was applied. The clay is hauled from a nearby source and mixed in a 50-50 blend with tailings left from mining decades ago.

The clay layer will be covered with plastic, then a three-foot layer of rock, followed by the crushed ore. The cyanide solution then is spread over the surface to trickle down through the rocks to the plastic layer.

That will be drained downhill to a concrete and plastic lined box to be collected and processed to remove the precious metals. That box will be buried underground as an overflow protection in case of floods.

Rock not used to extract gold and silver will be sold as aggregated and stored on the east side of the mine site. For every ton of rock used to extract gold and silver, the mine produces two and a half tons of rock that is not so used.

Some \$140 million will have been invested by the company and its joint venture investors by the time the mine is actually mining gold and silver.