

Community News

Akron unveils new renewable energy plant

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By Kathleen Folkerth

WEST AKRON — Akron officials touted the city's new renewable energy facility on Riverview Road Oct. 30 — a state-of-the-art system that Mayor Don Plusquellic was at a loss to explain.

"I don't know, but it works," said Plusquellic as he tried to say how the anaerobic digestion system (ADS), which will use 100 percent of the biosolids generated from the city's water reclamation facility, operates.

But the mayor was able to say why the plant's completion of Phase II is significant to city residents and taxpayers.

"This is another example of Akron leading in green technology," he said, noting that the \$32 million plant will soon be operational and serve as a model for KB BioEnergy to shop around to other communities looking to make their waste treatment systems more "green."

Plusquellic said for every community that constructs a system like Akron's with KB BioEnergy, the city will receive a royalty payment.

"We are part owners of this technology now," Plusquellic said. "I will tell other mayors about this, and the city of Akron will get a return on that investment we made."

The mayor said the history of the project goes back several years. He and city officials visited a site using similar technology in Germany, where the ADS process is common, in 2003. In 2007, KB BioEnergy built a smaller scale plant to pilot the system, and since 2008 it has been processing one-third of Akron's solid waste there with success.

The plant takes biosolids and transforms them into biogas that produces renewable energy in the form of electricity. The biogas in Phase II will be used to fuel three 600 kilowatt combined heat and power units. Excess electricity will be used to run the city's Water Reclamation Facility.

The facility is designed to dispose of all solids removed from wastewater treated at the Water Reclamation Facility, which treats waste water from Akron, as well as Bath, Cuyahoga Falls, Lakemore, Mogadore, Springfield, Stow, Tallmadge and parts of Fairlawn, Hudson and the Montrose area.

The ADS will begin to handle all solid waste 24 hours a day, seven days a week, starting in December. The system will fully replace Akron's 27-year-old composting system, which worked well for many years but was not as efficient as the new system will be, Plusquellic said.

The city opened the compost facility in 1986. Three years later, it entered into a public-private partnership with KB Compost, now KB BioEnergy, to manage the plant.

During the Oct. 30 event, Akron and KB BioEnergy officials mingled with representatives of local environmental organizations and plant employees as different aspects of the plant were highlighted.

Berger said the previously used Phase I will be upgraded. KB BioEnergy is also planning to construct a Phase III that will enable the plant to process food wastes, which could begin in about three years.

The company has about 30 employees running the facility, Berger added. She's hoping that a public open house can take place in the future.

The mayor noted that most residents will never set foot at the plant, but what's taking place there is important.



Attendees at the open house Oct. 30 get a look at the three combined heat and power units at Akron's renewable energy facility.






The large tank shown above at left is a digester for biosolids and can hold up to 700,000 gallons, according to KB BioEnergy officials. The smaller tanks hold biosolids before they are digested.

Photos: Kathleen Folkerth



KB BioEnergy Officer Greg Kurtz, KB BioEnergy President Thomas Kurtz, Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic, Akron Service Director John Moore and KB BioEnergy Vice President of Operations Annette Berger are shown above, from left, as the ribbon is cut at the new renewable energy facility on Riverview Road Oct. 30.

“This is going to benefit the citizens of Akron,” he said. “They just want to flush their toilet and they don’t want it to cost much.”

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