



William R. Williams, Altresco president, and Pittsfield Mayor Anne Everest Wojtkowski attended yesterday's ceremony marking the official opening of the co-generation plant.

Leslie Noyes / Berkshire Eagle Staff

Altresco opening: A reconciliation

Altresco ceremony helps reconcile opponents

PITTSFIELD — The Altresco co-generation plant a project that once seemed doomed by any of a handful of major problems and produced passionate and dedicated opponents, proved to be an ultimate accommodator yesterday as dignitaries snipped a ribbon to mark its official opening.

In fact, the plant, which produces steam to heat GE buildings and electricity that is sold to Northeast Utilities, has been operating for several months at varying degrees of its capacity. But the ceremony was still a landmark in that it brought together several individuals and groups that had not been sure the 160-megawatt plant was in the best interests of anyone but its investors.

For one thing, Edward Basinski, principal of Allendale School, acted as master of ceremonies.

Traces of polychlorinated biphenyls were discovered on the grounds of the school last winter, and though their presence was due to GE operations and not the construction of the plant, many parents worried that the plant had exacerbated the problem.

In his opening remarks, Basinski welcomed Altresco and its employees. He also referred to a school-business partnership between the school and Altresco.

Such partnerships, with active involvement of a business in the affairs of a school, were first proposed by the Central Berkshire Chamber of Commerce back in 1988 but are only now becoming reality. Altresco, Basinski said, benefits the entire Allendale community.

He was followed by Glen Hiner, GE senior vice president for plastics, who focused on the resistance that the project met in the community and the ways in which accommodation was reached.

Though the plant could have pitted neighbor against neighbor, Hiner said, negotiations resolved the problems and no real divisions resulted.

He said that both "our new neighbors, Altresco, and our old friends, Berkshire Gas," learned much about the importance of being open and honest in projects such as Altresco.

The candid sharing of information, Hiner said, should be emulated by anyone proposing construction with any potential impact on a community.

The "I-win, you-lose" style of doing business is outmoded by the example of Altresco, he said, and a more enlightened "I-win, you-win" approach should replace it.

Permanent pipeline

Mayor Anne Everest Wojtkowski referred to the work of a task force she heads that is finding an acceptable path through the city for a permanent pipeline to supply natural gas to the plant.

A previous route, approved by the state, was abandoned when opposition in Pittsfield and Richmond refused to go away. But Zeida Brandon, a resident of Lillian Street, a road traversed by the original route, attended yesterday's ceremony and expressed her hopes that all goes well for the generator.

Bruce Garlow, Richmond's town administrator, also attended. Like Brandon, the town of Richmond was granted intervenor status in the official review of the pipeline route.

Garlow said that he hoped Altresco and any other proponents of similar projects realized that all their environmental statements should be filed at once, not in pieces, to make sure that the project is completely thought out before work begins.

Altresco president William R. Williams choked up during yesterday's official opening.

By Steve Moore
Berkshire Eagle Staff

Emotional recap

Altresco president William R. Williams gave an emotional recapitulation of the project.

His father, the late Wilbur DeJoss Williams, for whom the plant is named, taught him that integrity is the most important aspect of any project, Williams said. He also taught him to respect the environment. The plant, he said, would make a difference for future generations.

Williams' mother and three children attended the ceremony. "I know there were times when you didn't think you had a father," Williams said to them, choking up.

Altresco will provide more than \$1 million in payroll to 35 employees, he said, and will pay more than \$1 million in taxes annually to state and local governments.

The plant also will remove more than 600 tons of pollutants every year. It replaces GE's old oil-burning boilers, which no longer meet Environmental Protection Agency standards. Because of its technology, the plant sets new standards for efficiency, cleanliness and quiet.

"This is tangible proof that economic growth and protection of the environment can go hand-in-hand," Williams said.

George Lehner, manager of the facility, noted the extraordinary safety of the plant and said that its methods of handling ammonia are being copied by other facilities.

After the ceremony, Williams said that Altresco is in the development stage of a second plant in Lynn, also for GE. That plant, he said, would be 240 megawatts, but construction is still a year away.

If there was any element of consolidation missing yesterday, it was that the ribbon-cutting, a natural magnet for politicians, both incumbent and hopeful, did not draw many. Only city councilors John P. Anderson Jr. and Cynthia L. Betters showed up.

And of the myriad candidates for offices, only Peter Larkin, who is running for state representative, attended.

The plant was proposed and designed by Altresco Inc. of Denver as its flagship co-generation project. Fluor Daniel of Irvine, Calif. was the construction company.