

POWER PLANT IN FULL SWING

County officials get tour of facility under construction in Rensselaer

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Section: Business, Page: D1

Date: Tuesday, June 2, 2009

RENSSELAER, NY -- Sean Spain has a heck of a job.

He's the plant manager at Empire Generating Co. LLC, an \$800 million, 635-megawatt power plant being built on Riverside Avenue here on the site of the former BASF dye-making factory.

While LG Constructors of Atlanta is responsible for building the facility, Spain is ultimately responsible for the plant, and will be given the keys once it's up and running and selling power into the state's wholesale market by next summer.

Right now, 500 construction workers are on the site and others are off-site working to install the natural gas pipeline and electric transmission lines that connect to the plant.

"So far, it's very close to schedule," Spain said. "The schedule looks good."

On Monday, Spain gave Rensselaer County Executive Kathleen Jimino a tour of the site along with Robert Pasinella, the county's director of economic development and planning. It was the first time Jimino had been to the site since a ground-breaking ceremony in the fall of 2007.

"I was very impressed," Jimino said after Spain took her around in a John Deere Gator. "It's very exciting to see it all coming to fruition."

Spain showed off the two massive 7FA gas turbines manufactured by General Electric Co. that will power two generators, also made by GE, to produce the

electricity. A steam turbine, which will run on steam made from waste heat from the two gas turbines, will be put in place later.

A cooling tower already is in place, and transmission lines are in place to transport the power to the electric grid.

The project is being funded by Energy Capital Partners, a private-equity firm in Short Hills, N.J., that bought the rights to the project in 2007 from Besicorp-Empire Development Co. LLC in Kingston for an undisclosed sum.

Energy Capital helped get the plant off the ground after years of inaction due to a lack at funding. Besicorp also had planned a newspaper recycling plant on the site, although that project failed to gain financing.

An affiliate of Energy Capital, FirstLight Power Resources of Hartford, Conn., is managing the construction of the plant and the operation.

Spain joined FirstLight about five months ago, but he is no stranger to the Capital Region or power plants. He previously was the manager at Athens Generating Co. LP's 1,080-megawatt, gas-powered plant in Greene County, which was built earlier this decade.

Spain has also worked at power plants in Charlton, Mass., and East Syracuse.

"In the power business, there are very good opportunities, but you've got to be ready to move," he said. "My wife, she said, 'We're done.' "

Meanwhile construction continues six days a week, including the building of four miles of natural gas pipe and eight miles of transmission lines. The "first fire" -- when the turbines will be fired up with natural gas -- will be in mid-February, with a completion date expected by mid-July next year.