

BYE-BYE BIG ROCK



CONSUMERS ENERGY FULFILLS ITS PROMISE
TO RESTORE THE BIG ROCK POINT FORMER
NUCLEAR SITE TO A NATURAL STATE.

Greenfield Celebration Highlights Plant's Successful Decommissioning

By Dan Gretzner

At 14 months old, little Jaiden Reed likely won't remember attending the August 29, 2006, celebration at Big Rock Point that signaled the successful return of the former nuclear plant to a greenfield.

But like hundreds of other former workers, family, friends, and neighbors in the crowd, she will be linked forever to the spirit of the site—and its incredible circle of life.

"I feel comfortable putting my child in the center where the reactor building stood and letting her play with the soil," said Jodie Reed, who developed final site survey designs and has spent the last nine years on the restoration effort. "That's how confident I am in our methods and techniques."

Since the plant's permanent shutdown in August 1997, Reed has worked in a variety of departments that included instrumentation calibration, radiation protection, and environmental services. "When I came up here, I was single and met my future husband at church," said Reed, noting that she worked until the day before Jaiden was born. "The people I worked with here became my family."

Left: The trademark sphere and crane to be used to dismantle the red and white stack stand sentry under a Charlevoix moon.

"After Jaiden was born, I went from writing specs for personal protection to obtaining soil samples for testing. To see the whole project come to fruition is amazing. It's truly a wonderful feeling knowing with 100 percent confidence that we're not leaving behind something that would harm a child."

MULTIPLE COMMEMORATIONS

Besides marking the return to a greenfield, the celebration also recognized the completion of the decommissioning project, the 44th anniversary of the operating license, and the ninth anniversary of the plant shutdown.

Kurt Haas, the current and 10th site manager at Big Rock Point, said a key purpose of the event was to thank and pay tribute to the men and women who worked so hard to make the journey on the road to green a success.

Haas said the team met its goal to safely restore the site to a state that brings praise from all stakeholders, including customers, employees, regulators, legislators, the public, and critics.

"In the next few months, we will finish the status surveys, complete the final grading, and seed the area," he said. "Then we will turn it over to Mother Nature, who will put the finishing touches on our journey."



All greenfield celebration attendees received a memento that was made from the plant's containment sphere steel.



Big Rock Point employees Pam Gibson (left) and Tracy Goble unveil the artist's rendition of the permanent landmark that will be located on or near the plant property as a testimonial to the plant and the people who worked there.

BIG ROCK POINT

DECOMMISSIONING MILESTONES

When Big Rock Point was shut down for the final time in 1997, the vision of the people who worked at the plant focused on restoring the site to what the nuclear industry calls “greenfield.”

Just as during 35 years of operation, a number of significant milestones were achieved as workers returned the site to “a greenfield, free for unrestricted use.”

08/29/06	Big Rock Point hosts its Greenfield Celebration on the 44th anniversary of receiving an operating license from the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission.	11/18/02	The first loaded dry fuel storage cask is delivered to the dry fuel storage installation.
04/25/06	Containment sphere shell steel removal complete.	4/26/01	Alternate Shutdown Building demolition complete.
04/12/06	Containment interior concrete demolition complete.	12/31/00	<i>Power Engineering</i> magazine selects Big Rock Point for a Project of the Year 2000 Award for the plant’s decommissioning power system.
12/11/05	Using explosives, controlled blasts successfully soften the concrete monolith located inside containment.	08/03/00	Big Rock Point employees achieve 23 years without a lost-time accident.
10/18/05	Containment sphere cutting and removal begins.	02/10/99	The plant’s main transformer is removed and shipped for continued use at the Thetford substation near Flint.
09/01/05	Turbine building demolition complete.	12/31/98	Big Rock Point is recognized by the National Safety Council for exemplary safety, as measured by recordable lost-time accident rates. The plant has worked safely for 6.4 million hours from August 4, 1977, to December 31, 1998.
10/27/04	Screen house demolition complete.	11/07/98	The emergency warning system sirens fall silent. Under the defueled emergency plan, the sirens are no longer needed and are no longer sounded on the first Saturday of each month, as had been required since 1982.
10/11/04	After serving as a beacon to boaters in Lake Michigan for more than 35 years, the plant’s trademark red and white stack is removed.	10/07/98	Big Rock Point’s application of a chemical process to remove radioactive contamination from the reactor and piping earns the plant an R&D 100 Award from <i>R&D Magazine</i> . Called “the Oscars of Invention,” the award recognizes the effort as one of 1998’s 100 most technologically significant products or processes.
09/08/04	Administration building demolition complete.	09/20/97	The final fuel bundle is removed from the plant’s reactor, officially starting the decommissioning and site restoration process.
08/31/04	Discharge canal restored and backfilled.		
07/07/04	Discharge canal drained.		
11/05/03	The steam drum is shipped for disposal in Utah.		
10/08/03	The reactor vessel is shipped for disposal in South Carolina.		
08/25/03	The reactor vessel is moved from its concrete base in containment and set in shipping container.		
05/29/03	The reactor head is shipped for disposal in Utah.		
03/26/03	Dry fuel storage loading campaign completed. The 441 fuel bundles are successfully loaded into dry fuel storage containers.		

One of nine guest speakers, Odawa Tribal chairman Frank Ettawageshik shared a song that honored Mother Earth and God. His ancestors had used the big rock on the nearby Lake Michigan shore as a navigational aid and meeting place for hundreds of years.

He said the plant, built in 1960, had completed its circle of life. “The big rock was a landmark for our people,” he said. “Although this is an ending, this is also a beginning. This was a place of service for jobs and energy.

“Today is a transition. This is a time when this land will remain in service as a group of us are working to retain this land in a way that will be useful for future generations.”

PRAISE FROM OFFICIALS

U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak (D-Mich.) also shared the site’s achievements with his entry into the *Congressional Record*. Representing Michigan’s First District, including Charlevoix, he’s been a member of the U.S. House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee for the last 12 years.

“While we’ve had a lot of debate on nuclear energy—its future and where it’s going to go—I’ve been able to point to Big Rock always with pride as an example of how nuclear energy should be and can be with the proper safeguards put into place by employees and management.”



Individuals representing all stakeholders in the plant vision of conducting restoration “in a manner that brings praise from all stakeholders” participated in a ceremonial planting of the “first” tree.



The program ended with a daytime fireworks display.

Michigan Sen. Jason Allen (R-Traverse City) and state Rep. Kevin Elsenheimer (R-Bellaire) presented a legislative tribute, while state Rep. Gary McDowell (D-Kincheloe) presented a special tribute from Gov. Jennifer Granholm. “There’s nothing more important than protecting our water, our land, and our air, and Consumers Energy recognizes that,” said McDowell, also noting that Big Rock Point is the state’s first and only nuclear plant that has been restored to a natural state.

Keith McConnell represented the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, while Paul Genoa represented the Nuclear Energy Institute.

CMS Energy president and chief executive officer Dave Joos, who started his company career at Big Rock Point, and Bob Fenech, senior vice president of fossil, nuclear, and hydro operations, each praised the dedication and commitment of site workers. “I wondered how difficult it was going to be for people to work on tearing something down that they had spent so many years putting their heart and soul into,” Joos said. “I guess I shouldn’t have been surprised that folks took every bit as much pride in doing that job right, from the beginning.

“They will leave a legacy here that will be long remembered—not just by the people locally but by the whole nuclear community—that this is how you do it.” ■

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