

Celebrating 75 years of CHP at the University of Illinois

Editor's note: *One of the most important activities that we can do as IDEA members is to spread the word about district energy/CHP beyond our immediate circle of colleagues and customers. "Telling our story" is a new feature in District Energy that will highlight successful efforts to educate and inform a broader audience about the benefits we can provide to cities, campuses and communities. If you have a story to share, please send it to pmyers@myersgroup.net.*

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign recently marked the 75th anniversary of Abbott Power Plant with a series of plant tours and a public open house. Among the hundreds of visitors were students, faculty, a Girl Scout troop and the governor of Illinois.

Abbott Power Plant provides steam and electricity to a campus that today

serves more than 43,000 students and 11,000 faculty and staff. Over the decades, the plant has made significant investments in equipment and training to enhance efficiency and reduce emissions, but as is the case with many district systems, its accomplishments have gone largely unrecognized by the local community. The university's Facilities & Services staff viewed the anniversary as an excellent opportunity to engage the campus community around the topic of energy production and conservation.

On Nov. 3, Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner toured Abbott Power Plant to learn about a proposal for retrofitting the facility to capture carbon dioxide emissions. The proposal is being developed by a multinational team led by the University of Illinois. The team, selected by the U.S. Department of Energy, includes Linde

Group, BASF, Affiliated Engineers Inc. and Burns & McDonnell.

The broader community had an opportunity to visit the plant during the open house Nov. 6. More than 160 students, faculty and staff learned about combined heat and power through tours, informational posters, a new video (<http://tinyurl.com/jz3bte7>) and product vendor displays that had been set up in a large tent next to the plant.

Director of Utility Operations at Facilities & Services Mike Larson says, "The open house was a tremendous success. Abbott has been supporting the academic mission of the university for eight decades, and it was great to tell our story firsthand to so many guests."

The final event, co-hosted by power plant management and the university's Electrical and Computer Engineering De-



Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner (center) meets the staff during his tour of Abbott Power Plant. Other visitors included Jim Schultz, director, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity; Timothy Killeen, president, University of Illinois; and Barbara Wilson, interim chancellor, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Photos courtesy University of Illinois Board of Trustees.



University of Illinois graduate students help the Girl Scouts learn how energy and water are used in the home and how they can be conserved.



Guided plant tours and poster displays gave visitors an insider's perspective on the production of heat and power at Abbott Power Plant.

partment, had a very different objective: to open the minds of young girls to the world of science and engineering. "I'm a lifelong Girl Scout and serve on the board of directors of the Girl Scouts of Central Illinois," says Ashlynn Stillwell, Ph.D., assistant professor of civic and environmental engineering at the university. "I've been working with the Girl Scouts to create new STEM programming. When I learned

about Abbott's 75th anniversary, I spoke to the plant managers, who suggested doing something special for the Girl Scouts." Nearly 100 girls showed up for the tour, hands-on demonstrations and a scavenger hunt among the vendor displays.

So what did the girls learn? "We set up a giant post-it board where the girls could post what they had learned," says Stillwell. "Answers included such statements as 'I

learned how we get heat for the university'; 'power plants make clouds'; 'the white gas coming out of the plant isn't smoke, it's steam'; and 'the stack is 205 feet tall.' Anecdotally, I overheard things like 'this is the coolest trip ever' and 'do I really get to keep this hard hat?' We even heard later from a family about their daughter who refused to take her hard hat off. I think the tour definitely made an impact." 