

Power station to fuel city coffers

Posted By BRENDAN WEDLEY, EXAMINER MUNICIPAL WRITER

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With the official opening of the hydroelectric generating station north of Trent University on Wednesday, Peterborough residents might start seeing things in a different light, a former Peterborough Utilities president says.

"Each time it rains it isn't just raining, it's dropping pennies," said Bob Lake, referring to how the city-owned utilities company makes more electricity and more money if more water flows past the generators.

It had just stopped raining before people gathered for the official opening of the Robert G. Lake Generating Station on the west side of the Otonabee River at about 1 p.m.

Peterborough Utilities named the generating station after Lake, who retired from the Peterborough Utilities group of companies in 2006.

Lake served as general manager of the Peterborough Utilities Commission from 1986 to 2000, when it was restructured as a private company with the city as its sole shareholder and Lake became its president.

The \$32-million, eight-megawatt hydroelectric generating station started feeding electricity into the provincial power grid in December. It can produce enough electricity to power about 3,000 homes.

Each year, Peterborough Distribution adds about 300 homes to its power network, said Larry Doran, the president and CEO of the Peterborough Utilities group of companies.

"This project alone will take care of the normal growth in Peterborough for close to a decade," he said.

Peterborough Utilities and Toronto-based Shaman Power Corp. partnered to form Trent Rapids Power Corp., which owns the station.

The generating station and canal are north of Woodland Dr., from just upstream of the Lock 23 dam to a little downstream of the Lock 22 dam.

Trent Rapids Power publicly began the process to build the station in 2005 with an environmental assessment and a series of public meetings. Some residents tried to stop the project to preserve the green space that would be torn up for the construction of the about one-kilometre long canal.

Trent University is leasing land to Trent Rapids Power, but Don O'Leary, the university's vice-president administration, refused to reveal how much money the university will make from the arrangement.

The university is bound by a confidentiality agreement, O'Leary said.

Trent Rapids Power has a 40-year agreement with the Ontario Power Authority to sell power from the facility to the provincial system at a base rate of 11.9 cents per kilowatt-hour.

Mayor Paul Ayotte pointed out that Peterborough residents are the owners of Peterborough Utilities.

"The citizens of this community are going to benefit in the long run," he said. "These companies have put a lot of money into the coffers of the City of Peterborough over the last 10 years."

The generating station joins the growing ranks of renewable power projects in the province, Peterborough MPP Jeff Leal told the about 70 people at the ceremony.

"It represents real and lasting economic benefit for this community," he said. "Congratulations to Peterborough Utilities and its partner for contributing to Ontario's and Peterborough's clean, bright future."

Lake commented on the history of water power in the Peterborough area, starting with Adam Scott who settled on the west bank of the Otonabee River in 1818 and soon build a water-powered saw mill and grist mill.

"Others came and built mills on the Otonabee to power their fledgling economy. By the late 1800s, electric generating stations were starting to convert water power to electricity. Quaker Oats built one of the early stations in Ontario to serve their own needs," Lake said.

Industry usually attracts more industry, Lake said.

"Water power attracted new business to Peterborough. In 1890, the Edison electric company, which very soon became General Electric, moved to Peterborough," he said.

"At one time Peterborough had one of the highest average industrial wages in Canada. To a certain extent, much of this happened as a result of water power. While this station will probably not have a large effect on the local economy, it will quietly and dependably contribute to the well being of Peterborough... It will continue to provide clean power."

bwedley@peterboroughexaminer.com