

Franklin County Citizen Leader

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Inside



Lavonia candidate forum to be held tonight

LAVONIA – The Lavonia Chamber of Commerce is inviting the public to a town hall forum tonight at 6:30 p.m. at the Lavonia Depot.

The candidates for the offices of mayor and city council will present their platforms at the forum.

In the mayor's race, Courtney Umbehant and Harold Harbin are running.

Harbin is a current member of the city council, while Umbehant resigned earlier this year in order to run for the mayor's seat.

In Post 4, Ralph Owens is facing Andrew Murphy.

Owens is the current mayor of Lavonia. He chose not to seek reelection and to seek the council seat instead.

In Post 3, incumbent Eddie Floyd is facing Mary Lou Jackson.

Michael Schulman, the only candidate in the Post 1 race, said he also plans to attend and will speak.

Each candidate will have three minutes for an opening statement.

Questions previously submitted by the public will be presented by the moderator to each candidate.

No questions will be taken from the floor.

Persons who live outside the city limits but have a Lavonia address are encouraged to attend because they have a vested interest in the city's socio-economic success.

Light refreshments will be served.

Sweet 16 for Lady Lions

..... Page 1B



One Act of 'Godspell'

..... Page 3A



Free books for young readers

..... Page 2A

Church calendar 9B
Classifieds ... 12B
Calendar 6A
Family news 7A
Franklin Echoes 11B
Legals 12-13B
Obituaries 7A
Opinion 8-9A
Police news ... 4A
Sports 1-3B



GRP Franklin Plant Manager David Groves (center) leads a group of county officials on a tour of the plant Monday. (Photos by Scoggins)

Pollution apology

GRP Plant officials own up to creek runoff

BY SHANE SCOGGINS
PUBLISHER

CARNESVILLE – Operators of an energy plant near Carnesville apologized for recent pollution of Indian Creek and said they are working to prevent it from ever happening again.

“What happened last week was very unfortunate,” GRP Franklin Plant Manager David Groves, who works for management firm Veolia, told county officials Monday. “For Veolia, I apologize.”

Residents along Indian Creek reported Oct. 5 that

See GRP,
Page 5A



A large pile of wood will be burned to create electricity at the GRP Franklin plant, county officials learned on a tour Monday. Water runoff from the wood pile was the source of recent pollution in Indian Creek.

County officials tour facility

BY SHANE SCOGGINS
PUBLISHER

CARNESVILLE – Franklin County officials were given a tour the Georgia Renewable Power (GRP) plant on Highway 198 Monday morning as part of a visit to get answers about environmen-

tal concerns at the plant.

Taking part in the tour were Franklin County Commissioners Thomas Bridges and Eddie Wester, County Manager Elizabeth Thomas, Tax Commissioner Bobby Martin, County Engineer John Phillips, Water Department Director Bob White

and Road Department Director Nick Johnson.

The Franklin County plant and a similar one in Madison County are owned by GRP, who contracts with Veolia, a French-based company, to

See TOUR,
Page 5A



Posing for a portrait

ROYSTON – A hand-drawn portrait was just one of many activities and goods offered Saturday at the Royston Fall Festival downtown. Hundreds came out on a near ideal day to shop from vendors, eat a variety of food, play games and listen to entertainment, which included dance teams, gospel music from New Vision and an evening concert from Legends of Destiny. The festival finished with a fireworks show. For more photos, see Page 10A. (Photo by Scoggins)

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18th better than first for FCMS runner

BY SHANE SCOGGINS
PUBLISHER

Right under her name on Ansley Moore's Instagram profile are the words “Running for Jesus.”

Ansley's parents, teammates and some of the best cross-country runners in the state of Georgia found out Saturday that those words aren't just a slogan for the Franklin County Middle School seventh grader.

Moore gave up a likely top five finish – maybe even a win – in the State Middle School Champion-

See MOORE,
Page 10AA



Ansley Moore gave up a top finish Saturday to help a competitor.

From the Front ▶

Tour: County officials tour Franklin GRP energy plant

operate them.

Currently, the plant is still working to become fully operational and is still in “startup” mode.

The Madison County plant is preparing for a performance test this week in order to become fully operational, Plant Manager David Groves, who works for Veolia, said. The Franklin plant is about three weeks away from that step.

The plant takes in waste wood, burns it to create steam, which turns a turbine to create electricity. The electricity is then sold to Georgia Power.

“We’re not doing anything here but making power and burning wood,” Groves said.

Wood is brought in from various places around the plant.

As much as 10,000 tons of wood may be on site at any one time. The plant will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Groves said, so fuel must be stored to allow for rainy days, weekends and holidays when suppliers do not work.

Wood is brought in and dumped into a collector that includes an electromagnet to capture any metal and a screen to catches over-sized pieces.

The large pieces are ground up and added to the pile later.

“The idea is to use all of it,” Groves said.

The wood is carried by conveyor belt and dumped in a large pile in front of the plant.

“Ideally, what comes in today will be fuel in seven days,” Groves said. “That’s ideally.”

In reality, it can take two or three weeks for wood to cycle through the plant, he said.

The plant is permitted by the state’s Environmental Protection Division (EPD) to burn three types of wood biomass.

Green wood is brought in from places where forests are thinned or pulpwood is harvested, Groves said. It will include the tops and bottoms of trees.

Construction and demolition waste that has been cleaned and picked through may be used.

Groves said there have been issues with such wood not being cleaned properly before being brought to the plant and three suppliers have been cut off.

The plant is also allowed to burn chipped railroad ties that have been treated with creosote.

“We are permitted to burn creosote,” Groves said.

EPD officials said that the plant’s records show that just three loads of chipped railroad ties – a very small amount of the plant’s overall wood deliveries – have been brought to the plant so far.

The ties that may be used are those that have been taken out of service after 20-30 years, Groves said. Studies have shown that up to 94 percent of the creosote in a railroad tie is gone after 25 years.

“By the time it gets to us, there’s not much remaining,” he said.

The creosote is consumed in the burning process, Groves said.

“I don’t worry too much about the creosote,” he said.

When fully operational, the plant will burn 15 tons of wood per hour and consume 800,000 to 1 million gallons of water per day, plant officials said.

The Franklin County Water System is supplying water to the plant.

The plant is monitored by computerized equipment at several different stages and must perform tests on its equipment regularly to make sure it is working properly.

Everything from the wood that comes in to the water that is used in the process to the emissions from the stack are tested, he said.

EPD permits regulate all of those factors.



Franklin GRP Plant Manager David Groves gave county officials a tour of the plant on Highway 198 Monday. Included in the tour was explanations about how the plant worked and the environmental regulations and monitoring procedures that the plant must keep track of and report. (Photos by Scoggins)



From the Front ▶

GRP: Plant officials, EPD give details on creek pollution

the water in the creek was black and fish were dying.

Farmers along the creek reported that their cows refused to drink the water.

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) investigated the cause of the pollution and traced the cause back to runoff from the GRP plant.

Derrick Williams of the EPD’s Athens office said that the creek was polluted by tannic water that had runoff from the large wood pile being kept in front of the plant for fuel once the plant is fully operational.

Groves said Monday the Franklin plant was “over-enthusiastic” in bringing in wood for the anticipated start of the plant.

Wood started coming in at the end of April.

Wood can sit for a while with no issues, Groves said, but after three months or so, unused wood starts to get “hot spots,” will smolder and can catch fire as workers move it around.

“We can’t have that,” he said.

Workers at the plant began to water down the pile a few weeks ago.

A few days before the pollution of Indian Creek, plant workers opened up water cannons to provide an “all day of rain for the pile,” Groves said.

There was no runoff from the pile that day.

Water to the pile was cut down the next day and again there was no runoff.

By the next day, though, the water began to runoff from the pile.

Because the wood has been at the plant for so long, it has started to decompose, Groves said.

“It does smell,” he said. “It stinks.”

As wood – and other plant material – decomposes, it releases tannins, an acidic substance.

The tannins pull the oxygen out of the water and lower the pH level of the water, Groves said.

The runoff from the pile flowed into a retention pond behind the facility.

Operations manager Daniel Rock told County Commissioners Thomas Bridges and Eddie Wester and Tax Commissioner Bobby Martin that a skimmer on the pond allowed the water to run into the creek.

As directed by the EPD, the plant had removed the skimmer and capped a drain that leads to the creek.

For now, any future runoff will be captured in a water tank, Rock said.

Groves said that an engineer will be brought in to design a solution that will stop the runoff, allow the water to be sampled and treated before any discharge.

“The root cause is that wood was way too old,”

Groves said. “You can go forth and say we brought too much in. And we did.”

Williams said that the plant will face violations for the discharge of the tannic water and killing the fish, which could mean a monetary settlement.

Williams and other EPD officials walked the pile of wood chips and inspected records.

Records show that the plant had taken three loads of chipped railroad ties, Williams said, which the plant is permitted to burn.

The amount of creosote in the pile from those three loads – less than .5 percent of the total pile – would not have been enough to cause the problems in the creek, he said.

The pollution of the creek should clear up as more water runs through the creek, and the damage was not enough to require dredging or other measures, Williams said.

Groves also addressed complaints from the community about noise and soot.

“We’re working through some bugs here,” he said.

GRP and Veolia plan to do a field sound survey.

Groves told county officials Monday that sound from the steam vent at the Franklin plant is too loud.

The noise comes from preparation to start the turbine when steam is let out through a vent. Rock

said that once the plant is operational, the turbine will only be stopped for maintenance one time each year, barring any mechanical issues.

The turbine itself is in an enclosed building.

Groves said there is no way to eliminate all sound but Veolia wants to do something to help it.

“We really do want to be good neighbors,” Groves said.

Sound, he said, does funny things. While it may not sound that loud close to the plant, it may be louder two miles away.

As for the reports of soot, Groves said that was harder to explain.

Ash from the burning process at the plant is captured and disposed of, the plant manager said.

An area dairy farmer is buying some of the ash and the rest is put into a landfill, he said.

Most of the emissions from the plant will be in the form of steam.

Other emissions will be regulated by the EPD, Groves said. The plant has limits on the amount of particulates it can emit.

Currently, since the plant is still in startup mode, those limits are not being enforced.

Still, Groves said, that there have been no large releases of emissions.

The plant has had issues with dust from the wood, he said.

And a screen that helps stop particulates from being emitted has to be cleaned occasionally, but Groves said he doesn’t know where the reports of soot are coming from.

Williams said his office has received complaints about stacks of railroad ties and burning piles of wood at the plant.

During the EPD inspection, there were no piles of railroad ties or fires found, he said.

County officials urged Groves to issue an apology to the community for the pollution of the creek and to answer a list of questions county officials sent to the plant and make them public.

“I think an apology and ‘we messed up’ would go a long way,” Martin said.

Groves said he would do both unless he is specifically told not to by GRP officials.

Once operational, the plant also plans to hold an open house and tours for the public, Groves said.

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