

Consumers stumps for Midland

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

Utilities cost his Troy business \$12,000-\$15,000 monthly. So Tom Gaudin Jr. is very concerned about Consumers Power Co.'s decisions.

He told the company so at a forum Thursday designed to drum up support for Consumers' controversial Midland Nuclear Plant.

"Do any of these high figures bother Consumers? My company spends a lot for utilities," said the president of Industrial Blazing, a round-the-clock operation with 35 employees.

"Every time you make a decision it costs me money."

"Yes, it bothers me," answered Gordon Helms, vice president of energy supply.

"I pay bills, too. And I don't get a discount on my utilities. We cherish those billions just like our own money at home."

TO CONVINCE "thought leaders" that their Midland nuclear electric generating plant should be completed, Consumers Power Co. officials last week started touring the state promoting the utility company and its goals.

Chamber of commerce members and local officials were invited to presentations Thursday in Pontiac and Royal Oak.

Company officials objected strenuously to a plan which would dump the troubled Midland project in exchange for increases in electrical rates.

Backing the proposal are Michigan Attorney General Frank J. Kelley, the Public Service Commission, Michigan Citizens Lobby and the Association of Businesses Advocating Tariff Equity (ABATE), which represents 33 of Michigan's largest industrial corporations.

Instead of a survival plan, Consumers officials call the "termination proposal" a "disaster plan."

"Essentially it would be a takeover of Consumers Power by the state," Helms told 35 people meeting in Royal Oak.

The vice president contends people are just trying to "wish away" problems at Midland, which was scheduled for completion in the mid-1970s.

"We look at electric needs in the state, and in our view there is no alternative to Midland," he said.

UNTIL THE OIL embargo, Consumers' electric loads grew at a rate of 8-10 percent a year.

In 1974 and 1975, the company had its first two

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consecutive years of declining sales.

Now Consumers spokesmen estimate there will be 2.5 percent yearly sales and growth in the future.

"In the past decade, the economy of the state has not grown as fast as the national economy," explained Phil Bickel, executive director of corporate planning.

"We don't expect Michigan to become a deserted state, but we don't expect it to grow as fast as the rest of the nation."

THE COMPANY does, however, expect things to turn around at the end of the century. It believes the demand will rise, and existing generating units built in the late 1940s and 1950s will be reaching their design life.

"With the Midland 2 generating unit, we can buy ourselves many years of growth and sufficient capacity to meet that growth," said Dave Lapinski, senior engineer.

"If we put Midland on line and the use is exactly what we predict, the lights will come on. If it's less than predicted, they will still come on," said Lapinski.

"But if it's more than predicted, the lights just might not come on."

ALTHOUGH IT IS now possible to buy power from such sources as Detroit Edison, Ontario Hydro and American Electric Power in Ohio, Consumers doesn't consider purchased power reliable.

"They always supply their own customers with the least expensive product. We'd be buying their leftovers," said Lapinski.

"Not putting in power plants is a formula for shortages. The answer is to keep having enough en-

ergy in the state to fulfill our needs."

During the presentation, members of the audience were asked to support the Midland project through group resolutions, letters to legislators and the media.

"The very clear sign we get from Wall Street is that the money exists to complete Midland 2, but we won't have access to it as long as there is opposition by the attorney general and others," said Norm Saari, public affairs director for Midland Nuclear Plant.

"If we can't raise that money through Wall Street, we'll have to consider other options like bankruptcy."

PRESSED ABOUT the cost to electric customers for the project, spokesmen said completion of Midland will raise electric rates 30-40 percent. They stressed that gas customers will not pay the electric hike.

"If it's more efficient, why will the rates leap like that?" asked one businessman. "With a commercial product, you can't do that — just raise the cost 30 percent."

Helms said nuclear energy is inexpensive to operate because of low fuel costs, but capital costs are high.

"The only source of revenue we have is the customer," added the vice president, who said that after 10 years in operation, fixed costs would be reduced by 25 percent.

"We just don't have anywhere else to get the money except our customers. If they're going to get service, they've got to pay for it."



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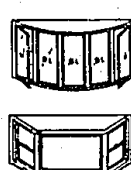
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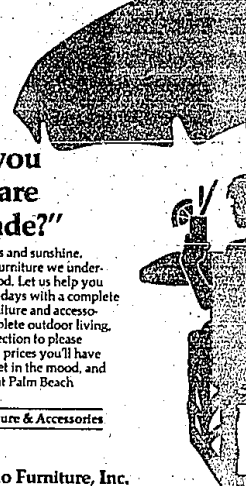
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