



Rik Jesse, FLORIDA TODAY

**Power plant.** Construction is in progress on the new Florida Power & Light Co. plant in Port St. John.

## Plant brings 239 jobs

8C

Friday  
July 1, 2011

# Community leaders, unions press for more Brevard hires

BY JEFF SCHWEERS  
FLORIDA TODAY

PORT ST. JOHN — When Florida Power & Light Co. announced last year that it was building a state-of-the-art clean energy plant here, local business and political leaders lauded the project and 650 temporary construction jobs it would create in a community with 10,000 unemployed construction workers.

They were excited when Zachry Industrial Inc., a Texas engineering company building the \$1.1 billion Cape Canaveral Next Generation Clean Energy Center, opened a hiring office in Cocoa in April to take applications from local workers.

Two months later, those leaders are concerned that Zachry hasn't hired enough Brevard workers.

County Commission Chairman Robin Fisher said he was disappointed that more local people aren't working at the Port St. John construction site, but he understood the specialized nature of much of the work.

"They are very cordial and professional, but they were very

## Power plant jobs

Zachry Industrial, Inc. has hired 239 people to work at the Florida Power & Light Co. power plant site in Port St. John.

- 70 from Brevard
- 101 from elsewhere in Florida
- 68 from outside Florida

Source: Zachry Industrial Inc.

clear that not everyone knows how to build a power plant," Fisher said.

He also noted the county cannot compel Zachry to hire locally because the project involves no tax incentives or government funding.

Of the 239 workers Zachry has hired, 70 of them, or 29 percent, are from Brevard, said Kathy Green, a spokeswoman for Zachry. Another 101 are from elsewhere in Florida, meaning the Sunshine State accounts for nearly 72 percent of the hires so far.

Those numbers, reported Wednesday, are up from a month

earlier, when 19 percent of the 157 workers were from Brevard and 52 percent were from Florida. "This is a very complex industrial facility," Green said. "Many of these positions require people with specific competencies and skills."

The company's hiring preference is former Zachry employees in good standing with the company, she said, and ideally, they are from Brevard.

Then, they take on all other qualified candidates with no employment history with Zachry.

"The preferences are based on what is in the best interest of the customer and the safety of our employees and doing the right thing," she said. "We don't change this format or these policies based on moving to another part of the state or going to another region of the country, so what we've laid out is consistent with what our managers said from the beginning."

She said the company has been working with Brevard Workforce and Florida's Small Business Development Center to find qualified workers.

See HIRING, 7C

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# Brevard leaders call for more local hires

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## HIRING, from 8C

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Union organizers staged a demonstration Wednesday to draw attention to the issue. About 50 showed up, carrying signs that read "Zachry Says No to Local Workers" and "Jobs Here is Job One."

Nathan Drain, recently laid off from a three-week construction job, was among them. He said the past two years, when the housing market collapsed and the economy softened, have been tough.

At one point he went seven months without finding work.

Drain heard that Zachry was bringing in people from out of town "so I really didn't stand a chance."

Dan Raymond, business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 2088, said he'd like locals to account for at least 50 percent of the labor force on the job site.

"We have more than adequate numbers to fill those jobs," he said.

When Zachry came into

town last year and met with the Brevard County Commission and Brevard Workforce, it "promised lots of jobs for local residents," said Fernando Rendon, a Brevard-based AFL-CIO representative. "So far, that hasn't happened."

Interviewed before the latest employment figures were released, Rendon said with Brevard unemployment hovering around 11 percent and a highly trained and available work force, finding the experienced workers Zachry needs should not be a problem.

Although he realizes the company isn't legally bound to hire locally, he said it should fulfill its commitment to the local economy.

Green said the company is committed to hiring as many locals as possible.

"If we can find the qualified candidates based on the positions locally, that is our preference," she said. "It is the right thing to do for the community, but a win for us, too." ■

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