

ENERGY in all its forms and applications is the star attraction at the CP&L Visitors Center, located on N.C. 87 about two miles north of Southport. STAFF PHOTOS BY ERIC CARLSON

Explore The World Of Energy At The CP&L Visitors Center

BY ERIC CARLSON

You flick the switch and the light comes on.

You turn the left knob and the water flows hot.

You punch some numbers, wait a few minutes and your dinner is cooked.

You take this all for granted. Because you can't remember a time when there was no electricity.

But have you ever wondered where that electricity comes from?

If you live or vacation in Brunswick County, those conveniences are made possible by 6 million pellets of Uranium 235 stacked in 35,840 zirconium alloy tubes bundled together to cause a controlled nuclear reaction that gives off heat that boils water that creates steam that turns a turbine that generates electricity.

All this takes place at the Carolina Power and Light Company's Brunswick Nuclear Plant, located off N.C. 87 about two miles north of Southport. When operating at full capacity, the plant's two boiling-water nuclear reactors produce enough electricity to power 350,000 homes.

Security regulations make it impossible for the public to tour the actual plant site, but for anyone interested in how nuclear power is generated, the nearby CP&L Visitors Center provides a fascinating and educational glimpse into the

world of energy.

Through a series of scale models, hands-on exhibits, video presentations, games and demonstrations, visitors learn about the different ways energy is created, used, conserved and wasted in our everyday lives.

A cut-away model of the Brunswick Nuclear Plant takes you inside one of the containment buildings, where the nuclear reactor is housed behind four to eight feet

of reinforced concrete.

By pushing a button, visitors can watch the control rods rising from the reactor vessel, heating the surrounding water and turning it into steam, which flows into the gen-

erator, where it sets the turbines spinning before being condensed back into water to begin the cycle again.

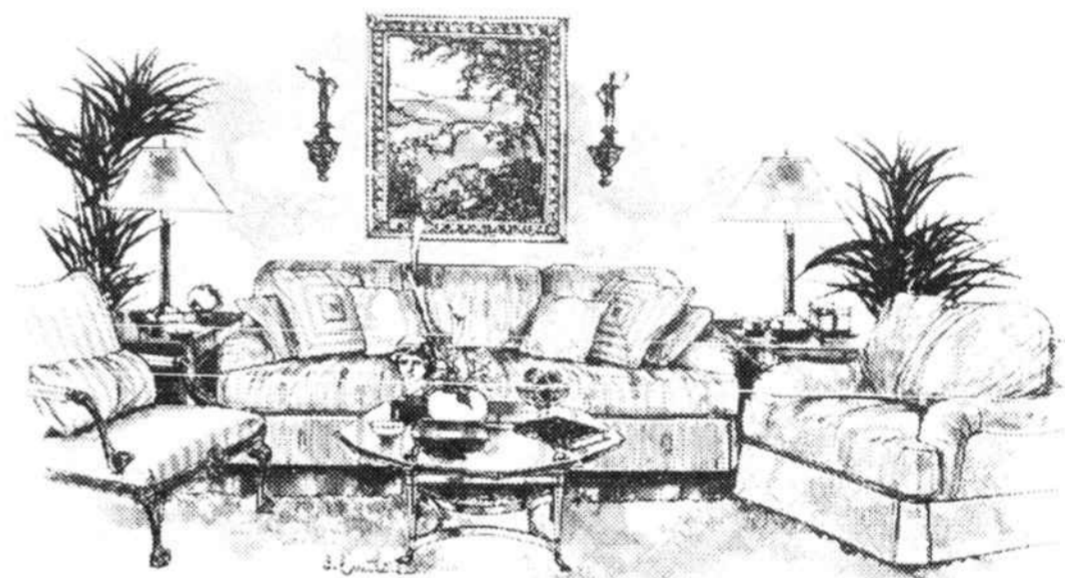
Diagrams show how the water that cools the condensers (without becoming radioactive) flows into a long canal that flows under a highway bridge just west of the plant. A sight that is commonly observed from the bridge sparks one of the most frequently asked questions at the visitors center.

An exhibit titled "What causes all the foam?" clears up the mystery with a videotape explaining that the layer of suds often seen along the canal is not a sign of pollution (since the only thing added to

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The Center is Open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. except holidays.

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