

A picture is worth a thousand words (and a tour, even more)

Editor's note: One of the most important activities that we can do as IDEA members is to inform our communities and policy makers about the multiple benefits we provide to cities and campuses. If you have a story to share, please send it to pmyers@myersgroup.net.

It's one thing to show a video to customers. Or send people to your website. Or give a presentation to a class of students. It's another to invite them to your plant. In fact, Houston-based Thermal Energy Corp. (TECO) has found that there's nothing quite like standing visitors next to a 13-story 48 MW combined heat and power plant to help tell the CHP and district energy story.

Ever since TECO completed a \$377 million expansion in 2011, it has welcomed groups from around the world – even from as far as Kenya – to tour its system on the Texas Medical Center campus. TECO averages more than 20 tour groups a year and most recently was honored to host Dr. Susanne Stark from Stadtwerke Düsseldorf AG, a large district energy provider in Germany.

TECO adapts tour content to participants' backgrounds. For example, in February 2016, TECO hosted Leadership AGC, a group of local up-and-coming construction industry leaders from Associated General Contractors of Houston (AGC Houston). Nearly 20 members and



TECO's Julian Brewster spearheaded the ringed-images project, and the company's Daryle Hall handled the intricate hanging process.

Courtesy Thermal Energy Corp. Photo Julian Brewster.

group leaders toured TECO's plant and met to discuss Texas Medical Center infrastructure and the role TECO plays on campus.

AGC Houston established Leadership AGC to address the inevitable generational shift that will require new and creative leadership. Charlene Anthony, senior director, Construction Futures/Education, AGC Houston, says the pro-

gram helps its younger members better understand the impact that construction – such as that on the Texas Medical Center campus – has had on the growth of the nation's fourth-largest city.

Program organizer and tour participant Blake Vacek, senior project manager at Marek Brothers Systems Inc., said they were pleased with this year's decision to tour TECO's plant. "When Steve Swinson

talked, his passion, knowledge and understanding of the Texas Medical Center really shone through," he said. "Steve explained how TECO has thoroughly planned to meet the cooling and heating needs of the campus decades into the future. It was impressive. Plus, we don't get to see plants like TECO's very often, so when we do, it opens our eyes to how the process works. It's amazing."

To enhance the experience for all groups, TECO installed information display boards adjacent to its control room. The control room itself has large windows so visitors can observe the operators at work without disturbing their space. TECO also features framed customer profiles in its hallways.

But what really capture visitors' attention are the ring-framed photos adjacent to TECO's board conference room. When TECO completed its major expansion project, the new conference room's

walls and surrounding hallways were bare and needed some artwork.

After a few brainstorming sessions, TECO decided to use leftover portions of various sizes of chilled-water piping from its construction projects and cut them into thin rings to serve as picture frames. Once the rings were cut, they were coated with chrome and ready to use in an entirely new way.

But which photos to frame? TECO pored over photos and selected key images to chronicle its story. Then it had each image reproduced on canvas and stretched over a board that was cut by a local cabinetmaker to fit the frame. Once completed, they were hung on the wall just outside the conference room. Pipe diameter sizes are noted above each of the nine rings.

The ringed images have been a unique way to put TECO on display and add value to the visitor experience. 



TECO representatives gave tours to members of Leadership AGC, a group of local up-and-coming construction industry leaders from Associated General Contractors of Houston, in February 2016.

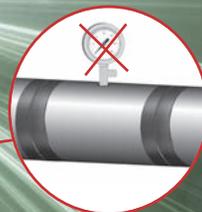
Courtesy Thermal Energy Corp. Photo Julian Brewster.

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