

Plant breaks ground

By [DARREN SIMON](#), Staff Writer

NILAND — In this far northeast corner of Imperial Valley, the Imperial Irrigation District broke ground Friday on a new power plant meant to ensure the district can meet power needs as its customer base grows.

The Niland gas turbine plant, expected to cost nearly \$100 million, will be the first new plant built by the district in nearly 30 years.

"The IID service area has experienced an economic expansion in recent years at an overall rate of about 7 percent," IID President Stella Mendoza said

"This new facility is representative of our efforts to continue providing reliable, affordable energy to our growing customer base," she said in statements made during a ceremony for the project Friday at its site.

The project also will prove significant, IID officials said, because of a labor agreement the district signed Friday with California Unions for Reliable Energy.

That agreement ensures contractors on the project must employ union workers, most of whom will come from the Valley.

Bob Balgenorth, CURE president, said there will be more than 120 construction jobs created as part of the project.

He said along with skilled workers, apprentices will be hired from the Valley and trained in the construction field.

"A trained workforce improves any local economy," Balgenorth said. "This county deserves and needs skilled workers who will help the economy both now and in the future."

Construction on the plant will begin in May and the facility will take a year to build.

The plant will generate 90 megawatts of power, enough to serve thousands of Imperial Valley homes.

As work begins on the Niland plant, IID officials are continuing to wrestle with a question of whether to move forward with a second major power plant project.

The Niland plant was to move forward simultaneously with the building of a new power facility in the El Centro area, but the El Centro project has been scrutinized as contract talks failed between the district and engineering firm that was to build that facility.

IID officials are now weighing whether they want to move forward with the El Centro project, which is expected to cost \$100,000 million, or whether they can find other energy resources to take its place.

>> Staff Writer [Darren Simon](#) can be contacted at dsimon@ivpressonline.com or at 337-3445.



[CUAUHTEMOC BELTRAN](#) PHOTO

FROM LEFT: Auggie Sadorra, president of the Niland Chamber of Commerce; Jose Luis Miranda, apprentice wireman and member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers No. 569; Bob Balgenorth, chairman of California Unions for Reliable Energy; IID Board of Directors President Stella Mendoza, directors John Pierre Menvielle and Jim Hanks; and IID General Manager Charlie Hosken break ground at the site of the future Niland Gas Turbine Plant on Friday.

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