

# Akron City

September-December 2007

## Akron: A City Inspired

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**New Biogas Plant Fires Up**

**A New Akron Home for Goodyear?**

**Take A Trip on the  
*Akron History Trails***

**Keeping Our City Beautiful...  
and Green (page 16)**

# Akron City

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## Our Cover Photo...

...is **Bruce Ford's** photo of the Akron Art Museum that opened this summer to international acclaim. The architect is Wolf Prix from Vienna. Akron area workers under the direction of Akron's Welty Construction Co. implemented the complex design.

**Tell us what you think** by replying to [editor@ci.akron.oh.us](mailto:editor@ci.akron.oh.us)

Or share your thoughts with the mayor at [mayor@ci.akron.oh.us](mailto:mayor@ci.akron.oh.us)

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# Saving Money And The Environment With **BIOGAS**

By Mary Davidson

City employee Brian Gresser spends his workdays in an environment that most people don't even want to think about. As manager of the City's wastewater treatment plant, he oversees the safe disposal of the icky stuff people flush down their toilets and drains.

Gresser understands his job is vital to Akron. And, these days, he finds it truly exciting. He will soon oversee a new, eco-friendly and cost-efficient system to dispose of Akron's waste. For an environmental engineer, that's like having a longed-for toy under the Christmas tree.

This fall, the City's contractor, KB Compost Services, is expected to flip the switch on a new, \$7 million biogas facility that will use bacteria and waste to generate electricity. Although such plants are not uncommon in Asia and Europe, it will be the first municipal operation of its kind in the United States. Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic learned about the concept during a trip to Germany and Switzerland. He believed it merited consideration as an option for Akron.

After much research and discussion, the City and KB, which is based in Independence, agreed to join forces in the construction and operations of the biogas plant, which will be located on the site of the City's existing compost facility on

Riverview Road. The project already has a big plus: The City's existing compost facility will provide some infrastructure for the new plant, which means significant savings in construction costs.

KB turned to Schmack Biogas AG for expertise and equipment. The two companies formed a new firm named Schmack Bio-Energy. Headquartered in Germany, Schmack Biogas AG was founded in 1995 by a group of farming brothers who had a lot of manure on their hands and no good ways to dispose of it. The company is now a leader in the biogas industry across Europe and Asia.

The City's initial investment in the project is \$835,000. The investment will be funded, in part, from the \$250,000 a year Akron now receives from KB Compost Services for the sale of compost made at the City's facility. KB is fronting the remainder of the initial investment with the hope that the lessons learned in Akron will help them open similar plants across the country.

The new system uses bacteria that don't need oxygen to ferment sewage sludge, a process called anaerobic digestion. The bacteria consume the sludge and produce a gas rich in methane. In previous applications, the gas was treated as a

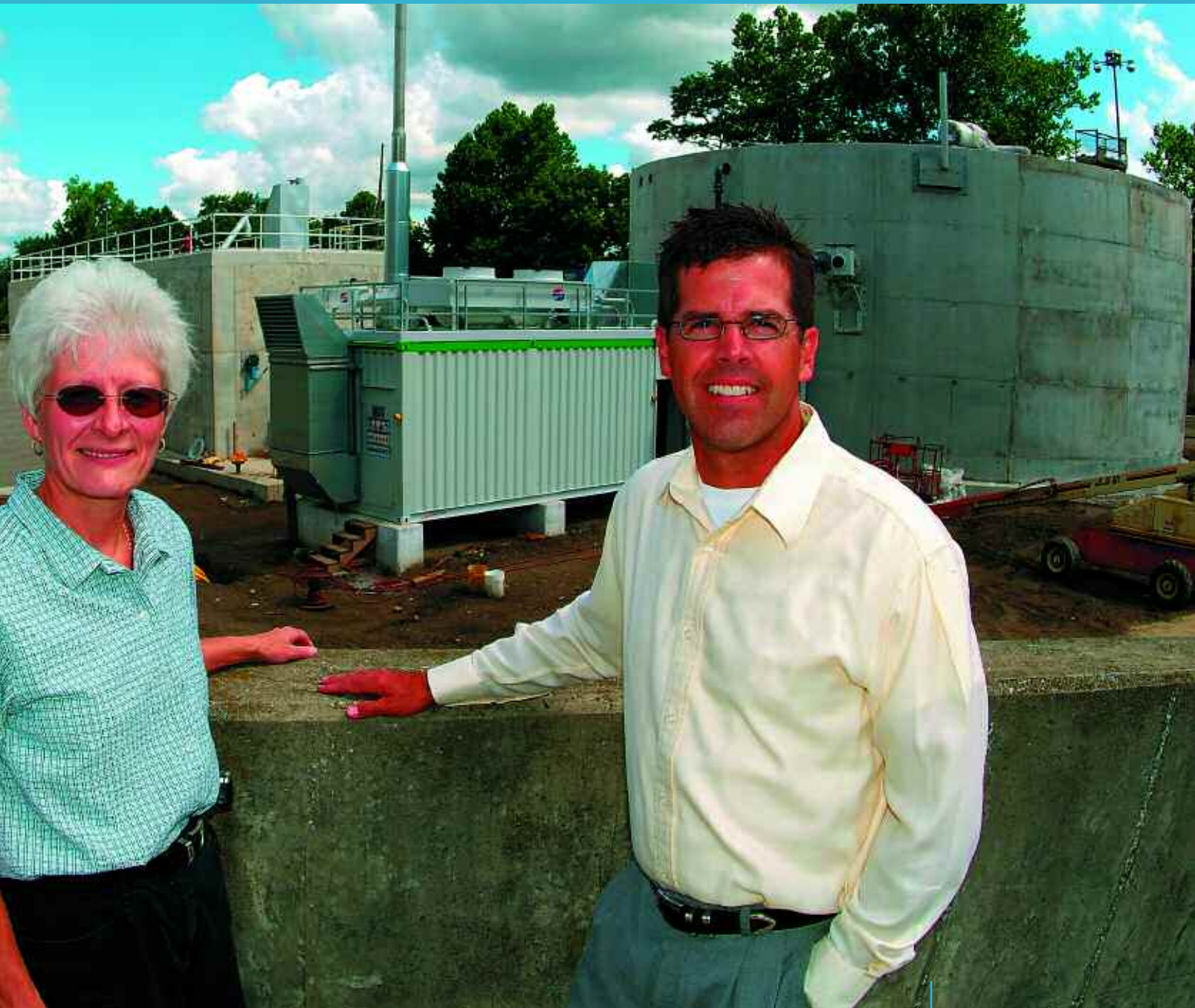
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Anaerobic digestion is a naturally occurring biological process in which large numbers of bacteria convert organic matter into methane and carbon dioxide (a mixture called biogas) in the absence of air. The process reduces germs and odors, and reduces the sludge quantity by converting part of the solids to biogas. Anaerobic digestion results in a product that contains stabilized solids, biogases and some available forms of nutrients.



useless byproduct and burned off. With the new system, the gas will be used to power an electric generator, explains Annette Berger, vice president of operations at KB. The new plant is designed to handle about 5,000 tons a year, which is one-third of the sludge that now goes through the compost plant.

Berger notes that concerns over the environment and rising costs for energy and wastewater treatment have caused a surge



of interest in anaerobic digestion and biogas in the United States. Akron will serve as a test market of sorts, she adds.

At present, the City spends about \$1.35 million a year in electricity costs for handling sewage waste from Akron and the suburbs tied to its system. The biogas facility is expected to reduce those costs. The biogas process will generate an estimated 335 kilowatts, with the new plant consuming 25 percent of that amount. The remainder

will be used to power other operations at the plant.

The City's contract with KB requires the partners to decide after 18 months of operation whether the process is working satisfactorily. "We have the right to walk away if the system is not meeting agreed-upon performance criteria," says Brian Gresser. If the system does meet expectations, it can be expanded to replace Akron's composting operation, which costs the City \$6.2 million a year and

sometimes creates an unpleasant odor.

With the new biogas plant, says Gresser, there should be significantly less smell because the facility is completely enclosed.

Cost efficient? Environmentally friendly? Less stink?

For Akron residents, biogas is going to be a breath of fresh air. ©

**Annette Berger, of KB Compost Services, and Brian Gresser, manager of the City's wastewater treatment plant, on-site at the City's new biogas facility, which will use bacteria and waste to generate electricity.**