

**GUEST VIEWPOINT**

**Seneca power plant would help a good company do better**

**BY AVON LEE BABB**

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Our family settled in the upper Willamette Valley in the 1860s. My father, Avon Dale Babb, was born in 1895 on the homestead north of Eugene now known as Santa Clara. My brother started Delta Sand & Gravel Company in 1965.

My dad walked to school when he attended the University of Oregon. Dad was a farmer most of his life; he also worked for the railroad for 23 years and was a businessman, a car salesman and a logger — and he produced sand and gravel.

We all care very much about our community and have supported it for a very long time.

I remember when Eugene was known as the timber capital of the world; it seemed as though log trucks were on Sixth and Seventh avenues all the time. How things change.

In my youth, not many kids went to college after high school. They would get a job working at a sawmill, in the woods or at a plywood plant starting at maybe 15 to 20 cents per hour less than a journeyman's wages — just like their dads, brothers, granddads or neighbors. They could support a family, own their own home, buy a camper and help send their kids to college.

Starting out at the mills meant working swing shift from 4 p.m. to midnight, or the graveyard shift from midnight until 8 a.m. A millworker's wife might work in the summers at a cannery in Eugene or Junction City, and maybe she'd pick crops for the local farmers.

Life was good.

I remember wigwam burners and heavy field burning. Every year, there were many days of smoke and smog from slash burning in the hills.

Now there are no more wigwam burners, no more field burning and little slash burning. How things change.

The news media make a big issue about new businesses coming to this area. Often, they fail to mention the low wages these new businesses pay and the fact that they offer few if any benefits. The pay and benefits are seldom enough to raise a family on.

I remember the living wage standard put forth by the city of Eugene not so long ago.

How things change.

Now most families need two people working to survive.

I question the greeting of new companies as saviors when their owners are from other countries and their money and profits don't stay here.

Now we have a company in Seneca Sawmill Co. where the owners live here and their employees live here. The owners, the Jones family, have been very quietly giving large amounts of money and support to the University of Oregon and to nonprofit organizations in our community. They are one of the pillars that support our community and give it strength. Seneca's workers' pay would meet Eugene's living wage standard and much more.

I wish people would look at the fact that we need people with jobs in our community — jobs such as the ones the Jones family and its company have a very long history of providing.

Employers and employed people are what make our community work. Think about who pays for our teachers, firemen and police, and for our city, county and state services. It is the property owners, employees and businesses.

I have been following the information stream about Seneca's proposed cogeneration plant.

To me, this is part of the future and certainly makes sense. The current debate is over the plant's effects — but there is little any of us do that doesn't have a cause and effect.

In my opinion, it would be a very heavy cross for us to bear if this plant is not allowed to be built.

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*Avon Lee Babb is manager and president of Delta Sand & Gravel Co. but wrote this essay as a private citizen. His company has no direct stake in the Seneca cogeneration proposal.*