

DRILLING FOR GAS



Times Photo by STEPHEN ROSE

■ Engineers Brett McLeod, right, and John Hair with the carbon steel pipeline that will bring natural gas to Canal Electric.

Tunnel under canal completed

By DAVID McPHERSON
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SANDWICH — The critical link in the effort to cut air pollution from the Canal Electric plant through the use of natural gas was forged yesterday with the completion of a 28-inch-wide tunnel drilled under the Cape Cod Canal.

Today, Canal Electric Co. officials will celebrate the success of the risky operation as the Wisconsin company hired for the drilling will thread through the hole an 18-inch pipeline that will bring natural gas to the plant.

"The drilling went very easily," said Peter Dimond of Commonwealth Electric Co., Canal Electric's sister company. "We're very pleased about it because we were half holding our breath to see if we'd be successful or not."

The drilling project's success and the start of construction on the rest of the pipeline will be marked today with a ceremony at the plant.

ComElectric had tested the soil ben-

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PETER DIMOND
Commonwealth Electric Co.

eath the canal to find the best place to install the pipeline, but the company admitted ahead of time that one boulder in the wrong place could stop the project.

"We've been working on this for a long time and have a lot of money invested in it," Dimond said. "It was never 100 percent certain that we'd be able to get the job done."

Now, Canal Electric and Algonquin Gas Transmission Co. of Boston will proceed with constructing the rest of the 5-mile pipeline that will bring natural gas to the plant.

Also, Canal Electric will begin modi-

fying the power plant to allow it to burn natural gas in the newer of the plant's two boilers — Canal Unit 2 — for up to 250 days per year. Unit 1 will still burn oil.

Unit 2 is expected to burn oil during the winter months when there is not expected to be a sufficient natural gas supply in the area to supply both the plant and Cape Cod homes heated by gas.

Built in the 1960s, Canal Electric for years had been the source of air pollution complaints from Upper Cape resi-

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dents. The complaints lessened after Canal Electric in April 1993 signed an agreement with the state Department of Environmental Protection that called for heavy fines for future air pollution violations.

In October 1993, Canal Electric and Algonquin announced a deal to build the pipeline to allow the oil-burning plant to begin using natural gas by April 1996. Most of the time since that announcement has been spent securing the approval

of federal, state and local regulators for the pipeline. The project drew objections from some Sagamore residents concerned about the pipeline running by their homes.

The new pipeline will stretch from an existing line by Route 25 in Bourne, through Bournedale, along the canal to Sagamore and then under the canal to the plant.

Drilling beneath the canal by Michels Pipeline Construction began late Friday, continued over the weekend and was completed yesterday afternoon.

Commonwealth Electric officials were elated by the project's success, Dimond said.

"For the engineers at ComElectric, this was an incredible accomplishment," he said. "The canal has never been crossed in this way before."

ComElectric has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in the project thus far, Dimond said. The total cost of the natural gas project has been estimated at \$22 million.

Canal Electric is owned by Commonwealth Electric of Wareham and Montaup Electric Co. of Somerset.

Today's 1 p.m. ceremony at the plant is open to the public. Local officials and Upper Cape residents who pushed for natural gas at Canal Electric are expected to attend.