River Bend generates electricity

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ST. FRANCISVILLE — After six years of construction and months of testing, Gulf States Utilities River Bend nuclear power plant Tuesday rolled its turbine and generated electricity.

“We synchronized the unit and generated about 60 megawatts of electricity,” GSU spokesman Bill Benedetto said. “We were at about 6 percent (of total generating capacity). We ran it for about 40 minutes and brought it down and checked it over and made some adjustments.”

Generating at only 6 percent of its total ability, the generator produced enough electricity to supply power to about 15,000 residential customers “during peak period,” Benedetto said. Once fully powered, the nuclear plant is expected to generate about 940 megawatts of electricity.

“We'll probably bring it back up in a few days,” he said. “Probably to that same level.”

The generator will then undergo a “seven-day outage for surveillance test procedures,” he said. “Then we’ll bring it up to higher levels at increasing increments.”

Benedetto said the turbine and generator “ran very well” and that there were no apparent problems with the system.

“We will continue testing,” he said.

The power generation began at 3:44 a.m. Tuesday.

The massive turbine weighs five and a half million pounds and the generator weighs two million pounds, Benedetto said. The electricity-producing machinery was manufactured by General Electric.

In late October GSU received its license from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to begin low-power testing of the River Bend nuclear reactor, and just three weeks ago the utility received its full-power license. With a low-power license the plant was allowed to run its reactor only up to 5 percent of total capacity.

Benedetto said GSU will increase the electricity output of its plant gradually over the next several months. GSU has said it expects to reach full commercial power capacity by March at the latest.

The 60 megawatts of power generated briefly Tuesday were sent onto GSU’s commercial power transmission grid.