More power to the college plan

Beloit College’s plan for a major renovation of the idled power plant along the Rock River is bold and intriguing.

It’s not without staggering costs—the college hopes private donors will back this grand, $30 million plan. However, students and staff already have been surveyed about possible uses of the nearby building. An architect has drawn sketches. The college’s board of trustees backed the idea this month. All these steps suggest that officials are confident they can meet this fundraising goal. Don’t bet against it.

For the city, the overhaul of the former Blackhawk Generating Station would be another in a string of remarkable riverfront projects that have kept Beloit from looking like just another Midwestern Rust Belt relic. Of course, the city in large part has Diane Hendricks and her late husband, Ken, of Beloit’s ABC Supply to thank for many of these improvements.

Janesville, in contrast, largely looks at Beloit’s riverfront redevelopment with envy.

The power plant plan would include a pedestrian bridge from Beloit College over Pleasant Street/Highway 51.

For the college, the plan would bring visibility and a connection to the river and community that are part of the institution’s heritage but that it lacks now, what with the campus tucked away on the hillside east of that thoroughfare.

The old power plant has 120,000 square feet of space that could be revamped to create a college activity and recreation center. In keeping with survey results, the plan calls for a fitness center and indoor track; a large and flexible, field house-style open space; and seating for about 150 in a lecture and movie hall. The building would feature a “green” roof, competition pool, wellness center, top-floor event space and places for student activities and lounges. The revamp would take advantage of river views, but suggestions for a boathouse or other activities on the river were wisely put aside because the nearby dam creates safety concerns.

To its credit, Wisconsin Power & Light has expressed interest in partnering with the college on the project and is hammering out details on an agreement. The plant burned coal until 1986, when it switched to natural gas before ceasing operations in 2010.

Don’t expect the project to happen overnight. College officials figure they’ll know within two years whether enough benefactors will support it.

Beloit College President Scott Bielman summed up the vision in a news release.

“If we are successful, Beloit and Beloit College will gain a landmark on the river that will celebrate the industrial history of this city while providing the college with a building that will be the envy of every small college in the country.”

It indeed would be another riverfront plum for our neighbor to the south.

The Gazette

Anything goes with attire in our flip-flop nation

CHICAGO

In “A Visit from the Goon Squad,” Jennifer Egan’s 2011 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, she paints a glorious portrait of a future where young people take a distinct pride in themselves and their appearances.

For instance, “all” kids were “clean,” meaning that they did not have “piercings, tattoos or scarifications,” which one character assumed came from “watching three generations of flaccid tattoos droop like moth-eaten upholstery over poorly stuffed biceps and saggy” posteriors.

If such a future were in the offing, there would be something to feel hopeful about. But our society has become so spoiled, so used to being catered to that I just hope the day never comes when standards fall so low that even the military no longer requires soldiers to wear the same uniforms.

How far-fetched is that, really? I can’t believe it last fall when some members of the Marine Corps staged a mini-revolt by openly violating their uniform regulations to wear bracelets commemorating fellow Marines killed in action. They subsequently got their way because a few commanders wanted to bend the rules for a good cause.

After that, it didn’t seem so hard to believe that the mayor of an American city could get shouted down for his refusal to relax the fire department’s dress code.

Mayor Arthur J. Ward of Bristol, Conn., recently found himself in a contentious battle when his firefighters asked for permission to wear pink T-shirts to work in order to raise funds for and awareness of breast cancer. Ward declined because the firefighters’ contract clearly states that they must wear blue shirts as part of their uniform.

Ward, whose own mother died from breast can-