

INNOVATION VALLEY (ivalley.org)

A good wind blows in Worcester

James Moreau

INNOVATION VALLEY/PATRIOT COLUMNIST

[Every month the Innovation Valley column explores an economic innovation that either takes place in the Merrimack Valley or is relevant to it. The following article by my colleague James Moreau explores an important achievement in Worcester we can all learn from. - sji]

“In addition to the economic benefits that wind power affords, the installation of this wind turbine is an opportunity to implement our responsibility to be a good steward of the earth.”

- Holy Name High School President, Mary E. Riordan

Driving North on Route 146 into Worcester an unusual site has residents talking about the one of the city’s newest renewable energy developments located on the property of Holy Name High School.

The 242 foot tall, 600-kilowatt wind turbine is visible for miles from many parts of the city. Currently operational, the wind turbine is expected to provide most of Holy Name’s electric power year-round, making Holy Name one of the most energy neutral schools in the world. During the winter, some electricity may be purchased off of the grid, but during the summer the school is expected to sell electricity back to the grid. Tax credits will also be sold to individuals and organizations whose contributions have helped fund the project.

The massive wind turbine on a hill serves as a beacon for the Central Massachusetts region attempting to make a turn towards the new, sustainable economy that other parts of the country have already begun embracing.

The President of Holy Name High School, Mary Riordan, was faced with a problem many Americans are familiar with; the rising cost of fuel and energy. Crude oil and gasoline prices have forced many to drive less and will probably force those who use oil to heat their homes to keep a cooler house during the winter. Even electricity costs are bound to continue to rise due to the inefficient coal fired power plants producing much of the country’s

energy. The financial squeeze is officially on and there is a wave of innovators in the United States as well as around the world who are thinking up ways to confront the conundrum of fueling our lives with non-renewable, dirty, carbon-based chemicals.

Natural resources and enthusiasm are good starting points for a solid renewable energy economy to take foot, but with the high initial cost of establishing and growing a business, strong public awareness and policy are necessary to fund good ideas. Each state, including Massachusetts has a particular geographic or social asset that can be exploited with renewable energy.

People associate places like California and Arizona with a lot of sun and heat, but Massachusetts is currently having a wave of solar manufacturers and installers set up shop and open themselves up to the Northeast energy market. There are also certain parts of Massachusetts, as well as most other East Coast states that have a great proximity to wind patterns that are perfect for wind turbine electricity generation, such as hilly Worcester.

The proliferation of windmills in Denmark and solar cells in California are examples of proven policy and business models that have inspired communities around the world to explore their own suitability for renewable power. Worcester’s main apparent strength lies in its location within a relatively windy and hilly geographic area. Additionally, Worcester has 11 colleges and universities within its county limits - a concentration of academic resources in



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- Mary E. Riordan, Holy Name High School President

the Northeast region is second only to Boston.

Mary Riordan’s vision of erecting a wind turbine would not have been as easy without the students of WPI helping to assess the project’s feasibility.

Additionally, the \$575,000 in grants that were secured from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative was only a fraction of the total cost. The rest of the money was donated or loaned at low interest by the local municipality, individuals or non-profits supporting Holy Name.

Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick has made way for tax incentives to be offered to more renewable energy companies than

every before. Residential tax incentives have also been extended to homeowners who wish to use solar or wind power in whichever ways they can.

These sorts of tax programs that encourage economic development in the green sectors help everybody in the long run. Businesses such as Borrego Solar, originally operating out of California have come to the east coast to set up shop and opened their first regional office in Chelmsford.

These business opportunities are also leading to exciting job training and educational opportunities. The massive shift in infrastructures and skill base will need to be met with a whole new force of “green collar” workers. The Massachusetts Technology Collaborative is currently working with vocational high

schools and community colleges across the state to develop and support green technology and renewable energy curriculum.

A decade ago, few Worcester residents would have imagined a wind turbine being erected on one of its high schools campuses to lower energy costs in a clean and efficient way. Now with business and individual interest peaking, legislators must get to work to make way for a renewable energy economy. Marybeth Cambell, the Public Education Coordinator at the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative believes there are a lot of exciting instances of renewable technology happening in Massachusetts but also stressed, “policy plays a major role in attracting renewable companies to Massachusetts.”

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The Innovation Valley initiative seeks to help stimulate economic growth and quality-of-life enhancements in the Merrimack Valley. Every month we will report on innovative businesses, practices, and ideas that are helping to make Merrimack Valley the place to be. Look for our article in print media and online at www.ivalley.org.

 Seth Itzkan is president of Planet-TECH Associates, a consulting agency identifying innovations in economic development. Recently, Mr. Itzkan helped The Boston Foundation to conceptualize and implement its Hub of Innovations tool. You can email him at seth.itzkan@gmail.com

 John Michitson was a Haverhill city councilor for 10 years; the last 2 as president. He is a manager and electrical engineer at the MITRE Corporation in Bedford, Mass. John and his wife, Heidi, are enjoying the childhood of their 7-year-old daughter and 9 year-old son. email: john@michitson.com

Annual Green Energy and Sustainable Practices Exposition in Newburyport

NEWBURYPORT—The second annual Green Energy and Sustainable Practices Exposition occurs Friday and Saturday, November 14-15, 2008 at the Rupert A. Nock Middle School at 70 Low Street in Newburyport. The expo is presented by the Greater Newburyport Eco Collaborative, on behalf of the Greater

Newburyport Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the City of Newburyport, and the Greater Newburyport Environmental Network.

The expo is open to the public Friday, 3:30 to 6 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3

p.m., and will focus on the green economy.

This 2-day event will include panel discussions on the green building, the green interior environment, alternative energy, transportation, and low-cost energy measures. Workshops will focus on green investing and green landscaping.

Vendors will be on hand to provide assistance for visitors to learn about products and services to reduce energy costs and boost energy consumption efficiency of homes and office buildings, including heating/cooling systems, water consumption, and waste recycling and usage.

The purpose of the expo is to make available to the general public, businesses and organizations the latest information and practices in the field of renewable energy and the latest products and services in the construction of energy

efficient homes and commercial spaces. These services range from consultation services like energy audits to professionals offering green interior design services and architectural services to providers of green building products that save on energy or use sustainable raw materials.

There are a variety of exhibition and presentation spots available. If you are interested in being an exhibitor or would like more information, please contact Elizabeth Brugger at elizabethbrugger@comcast.net.

Opportunities are available for businesses and organizations to become a sponsor of the event. Sponsorships levels range from \$250 to \$1,000 and afford an array benefits. For more information, please contact either Ann Ormond at aormond@newburyportchamber.org or Lynn Kinsella at @lkinsella@netkane.com.

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