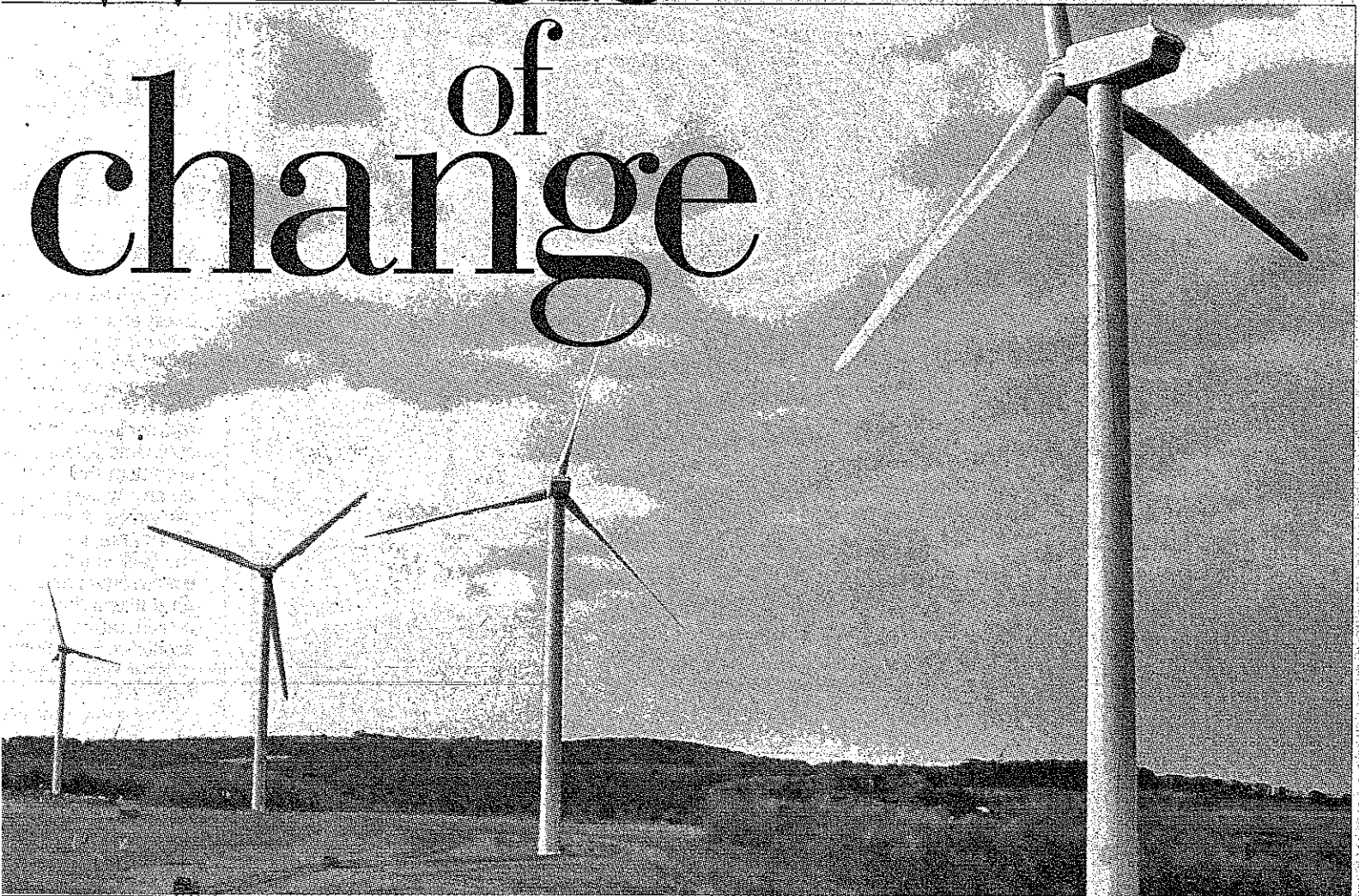


Winds of change



V.W.H. Campbell Jr./Post-Gazette

St. Francis
University
project promotes
community
electricity
generation

By Elwin Green
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Paul Lehman had high hopes when Erik Foley from St. Francis University came by his farm to set up an anemometer last spring.

Mr. Lehman had contacted the Loretto school's Renewable Energy Center to learn about the possibility of placing a wind turbine on his Black Angus dairy farm. The anemometer would measure the breezes that blew across the Boswell farm, between Johnstown and Somerset, to determine

whether there was enough wind to make the use of a turbine practical.

This spring, after a year's worth of data had been collected, Mr. Lehman's hopes were dashed. The turbine he wanted to build would require an average wind speed of 15 miles per hour. His "wind resource" was a little more than 12 miles per hour.

"We were hoping for things to be better," he said. "But ignorance is not bliss."

Mr. Lehman, 67, is one of a handful of people who have made use of the energy center, created in 2005 to encourage "alternative

energy development that supports environmental stewardship while spurring economic development and social equity."

In practice, that mouthful of clauses has mostly come down to working at research that may help to produce "community wind" projects — that is, wind power projects that would generate 1 to 10 megawatts of electricity, in contrast to the large-scale commercial projects that gain a lion's share of the attention, and government dollars.

Project promotes community wind power generation

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The cornerstone of the center's work is the Pennsylvania Wind Assessment Program, which does for landowners throughout the state what it did for Mr. Lehman: measure their available wind to determine if there is enough for one or more turbines. There are half a dozen anemometers at work; by November two of them in northern Cambria County will have completed the 12 months of testing necessary to judge the feasibility of a project.

Once a final report is completed for each of the sites, both of which appear to be good candidates, their development could go in one of three directions, said Mr. Foley, the director of the center.

- An outside developer could be brought in to construct a wind farm, although "there's a lot of companies that are not interested in the smaller projects."

- The landowner could develop a project themselves — often in cooperation with neighbors, "to make the project a little bigger" — and work with the St. Francis center "to get together the capital to do it."

- Finally, if a larger project is already nearby, a site could be added to it. "That's on the list, but it's not in alignment with the mission, which is about local ownership," Mr. Foley said. "The 'community' in community wind is a question of ownership. It's about trying to get more of a financial benefit to the landowner than simply a lease payment; there's an equity stake in the project."

Whatever the path taken, the development of a wind farm also must pass through a permitting phase, dealing with such matters as zoning, before acquiring the financing that will enable the construction. So the work that is being done by the center now is still very early in a process that may last four to six years.