

# Energy crunch blows wind to forefront

## New program tests area resources and provides students with research opportunities

*Wind WATCH is free  
for participating  
landowners.*

BY MARJORIE WERTZ  
FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW

A Pennsylvania university is hoping the wind blows favorably for a new statewide assessment program called Wind WATCH.

St. Francis University of Loretto is launching Wind WATCH—an acronym for Wind Assessment Technology for Communities and Homeowners. The program is designed to test wind resources on private and public lands and provide its students with unique field work and research opportunities.

"Wind energy is talked about in three different scales; small wind that would power one house, commercial scale in which one megawatt of energy will power about 300 homes, and the middle scale, or community wind," said Erik Foley, director of the St. Francis Center for Collaborative Conservation, a newly created environmental center that manages the Wind WATCH program.

Community wind refers to locally owned, utility-scale wind projects defined as being between 750 kilowatts and 10 megawatts, the equivalent to the energy load of between 200 and 3,000 homes.

"St. Francis is purchasing five 60-meter meteorological towers, and on top of each tower we will put wind vanes and anemome-

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*"It saves me money on my electric bill,  
especially in the winter."*

ANDREW WEISS

DERRY RESIDENT WHO POWERS HIS HOME WITH WIND ENERGY

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ters, wind testing devices (which measure speed). We will select five sites from all across the state for this year's program," Foley said. "If a landowner's site is selected, there is a borrower or loan agreement that must be signed between the landowner and St. Francis to cover liability issues."

The program is free because the landowner is only borrowing the equipment. St. Francis students and Wind WATCH study participants will retrieve

all the data from the systems.

There are some important requirements that must be met to participate in the program.

"There must be at least 13-mph winds, on average, on the land. If the land is in a valley, it's not likely a good wind resource," said Foley. "The tower will be on the site for at least a year. And the landowner must allow students and Wind WATCH people access to the tower in order to collect data."

The purpose of the project is

threefold: to provide economic development opportunities to Pennsylvania landowners, to offer innovative educational opportunities for St. Francis students, and to help the state learn more about its wind resource.

Support for the Wind WATCH program comes from the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies, in Johnstown, and the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The Penn State Cooperative Extension in Westmoreland County also is tapping in to wind power. The extension installed a windmill last November along Donohoe Road to provide electricity to the Donohoe Center. The system was turned on in May.

SEE WIND • B2

# Program aims to study wind power

WIND • FROM B1

"Much of Westmoreland County is in Class 2 wind, which is marginal wind for power production," said Gary Sheppard, director of the county's extension service. "Our system is a 10-kilowatt turbine that sits on a 120-foot tall tower. We also have two solar rays capable of 2 kilowatts of power."

The wind system at the Donohoe Center wasn't cheap. The tower itself cost \$10,000.

"The price of installation depends dramatically on the site. Since we aren't on a big hill, our tower height is the highest the manufacturer offered," said Sheppard. "The price of energy is going

up and as the cost of energy climbs, particularly electricity, the cost of these systems will change as more and more people install them."

Many years ago, Andrew Weiss, of Derry Township, knew the price of electricity would rise, so he harnessed the power of the wind for his home.

"I've had my wind system since about 1980," said Weiss, 64. "The tower is 100 foot tall and the blade

diameter is around 26 feet. I did a wind study and knew it was a marginal area for wind."

This year, Allegheny Power installed a new digital net metering system on Weiss' system that turns backward when the generator is producing more energy than his electricity demands. Net metering allows him to use his generator to offset electrical consumption over the billing period, thereby saving him money.

"I knew energy costs were going to go up and, by golly, they have," said Weiss. "It saves me money on my electric bill, especially in the winter."

Applications for the St. Francis Wind WATCH program may be obtained by calling 814-472-2872.

For more information on the small wind system at the Donohoe Center, stop in at the county Penn State Cooperative Extension or call 724-837-1402.