



Green technology reaps big savings for TR schools

BY SARAH MILLARD • HERALD TIMES REPORTER • APRIL 21, 2009

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TWO RIVERS — The Two Rivers School District's recent efforts to become eco-friendly are paying off with energy and financial savings.

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The district installed an irrigation system to water the athletic fields. The pool is heated with solar panels. The district replaced light fixtures in gym and shop areas to conserve energy. It will soon add 66 of Orion Energy Systems' Apollo Light Pipes to the gym.

The installation costs for the programs are outweighed by the thousands of dollars saved, Maintenance Director Bob Bauknecht said.

"I am always looking into that to see what we can come up with," Bauknecht said.

The irrigation system takes rainwater from the roof and parking lots and stores it in a retention pond. The athletic fields are watered from the pond.

"We can use the water to keep our grass green," Superintendent Randy Fredrikson said of the irrigation system installed about five years ago.

The total saving is hard to tally. The district does not measure the amount of water sent from the pond to the fields, Fredrikson said.

The solar panels, valued at \$178,000 installed, were placed on the roof of the high school by SolarMining of Green Bay at no charge. The district agreed to pay the company for power generated by the panels and used in the future. But the company went out of business soon after the panels were installed.

A SolarMining investor then sold the panels to the district for \$1 to avoid liability issues after the company folded, Bauknecht said.

"We actually own them now and everything we are producing is free," Bauknecht said. "We all were kind of smiling on that one."

The estimated savings using solar panels during a period of 20 years is \$184,562. The panels are estimated to reduce nearly 65,300 pounds of greenhouse gases each year, Bauknecht said.

"You get a hard number your first year, but then you anticipate the price of gas moving up, so I don't know how they can predict 20 years out what the price of gas will be," he added. "...That is some pretty awesome numbers if you think about it," he added.

The panels have saved the district \$3,074 in heating costs from Oct. 1 to Feb. 11, Bauknecht said.

The light pipes are a \$66,000 investment. Orion is putting the fixtures in the gym at no cost to the district.

"We are using various state and local grant and rebate programs to buy down the costs of the installation and monitoring the results," said Tom Teteak, director of Orion's Apollo business unit. "We are monitoring actual energy reduction values ... (The district) has some really strong energy saving initiatives."

The light pipes will be installed after the school year is complete, Teteak said.

The three-phase energy reduction project includes light fixtures, controls and the light pipes, Teteak said.



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Bob Bauknecht, director of maintenance and operations, poses by one of the solar panels, located on the roof, that provides energy to heat the swimming pool at Two Rivers High School.

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Bob Bauknecht, Two Rivers School District maintenance director, poses on the roof by one of the solar panels that provides heat to the Two Rivers High School swimming pool.

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"Even though we have become a publicly traded company, we continue to give back to the community," Teteak said, referring to projects and donations throughout Manitowoc County.

"I am still excited about these light pipes," Bauknecht said. "I can't wait to get that going. It is kind of neat, you know, a manufacturer in the area that says, 'Hey, we want to come out and use your building as a pilot program and we will put these in for free.' It is a \$66,000 gift."

Bauknecht began conversations with Orion when he toured the plant before the district purchased 120 fixtures to illuminate the district's gym and shop areas, he said.

The energy-efficient florescent light bulbs from Orion were installed in 2007. The energy savings for the lights are estimated at \$7,000, Bauknecht said.

"We received through public benefits ... a \$5,000 rebate on that," he said. "We are in the second year of it, so it has already paid for itself."

While the district has made strides to save money while protecting the environment, it continues to look forward by investigate the possibility of a wind tower to generate electricity and help cut its heating bill. The district also has asked GreenSky Energetics Inc. of Manitowoc to examine the prospect of heating the maintenance shed with solar energy.

"We are going to take a look at it to see if it is worth investing some money to cut the heating bill," he said.

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