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Charter school harnesses wind

POCATELLO COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL PHOTO

Students of the Pocatello Community Charter School and members of the community work to put the school's wind turbine together.

School's wind turbine is first in city limits

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POCATELLO — Pocatello Community Charter School student Arwen Baxter didn't know what she was looking at when she saw a field of massive towers topped with long, spinning blades during a family vacation last summer.

This school year, however, she and her classmates have a wind turbine of their own to study.

ON THE NET

◆ For more information on Wind for Schools, go to http://coen.boisestate.edu/WindEnergy/WfS/index.asp

About three weeks ago, the school erected the first wind turbine to be located within city limits. The school's 51-foot-tall source of renewable energy was made possible by a program based out of Boise State University called Wind for Schools, as well as a $12,500 Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant and several other corporate and private donations. The total cost of the turbine was about $20,000.

See Wind, A6

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Arwen Baxter, left, Stefani Miller and Carson Kelly, fourth- and fifth-graders at the Pocatello Community Charter School, talk about the new power generating wind turbine the school erected.

Wind turbine dedication set for Sept. 23

The charter school has scheduled a dedication to publicly unveil its high-tech teaching device for 11 a.m. Sept. 23. Speakers, including the mayor, and all of the students will attend.

"My dad's really proud (of the charter school's new turbine) because he's a scientist (at Idaho State University)," Baxter said.

Daily readings from the new turbine will be included online with readings from other participating schools. Students at the charter school will help take the readings, and the turbine will be particularly useful to the seventh- and eighth-graders, who have an extensive alternative energy lesson.

Baxter and her third- and fourth-grade classmates are now reading the book "Catch the Wind" to learn more about the parts and purposes of wind turbines.

"There are three main parts to a wind turbine: the blades, the tower and the nacelle," Carson Kelly, a student in the third- and fourth-grade class, said in summarizing a lesson from the book.

Kelly likened the nacelle to the brains of a wind turbine and explained it contains the generator.

In addition to the turbine, the charter school already had a solar panel.

"I'm really happy that about 25 percent of our energy (at the charter school) is green because of our solar panel, too," Kelly said. "We're the first place in Pocatello to have a wind turbine."

Charter school students are studying society's dependence on fossil fuels and learning the difference between renewable and nonrenewable energy, using the wind turbine as a visual example.

"It helps our earth and our environment so it's not polluted," said classmate Stefani Miller.

The turbine is capable of producing 2.4 kilowatts of electricity, and the power will be sent to the general grid. The school will get credits on its utility bills for the power it produces.

Principal Martha Martin, however, explained making power isn't really the point.

"Our school has an environmental focus, so having a wind turbine on campus serves as a nice message," Martin said. "It is a residential turbine. It's not meant to power our school. It will probably give us pennies on the dollar."

Billie Johnson, an engineer with ON Semiconductor who coaches MATCHCOUNTS at the charter school, learned of the program and attended a wind turbine dedication at Skyline High School in Idaho Falls.

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Pocatello Community Charter School principal Martha Martin talks about how the community helped with the new wind turbine the school erected.

Though the wind doesn't blow particularly hard on the charter school grounds, officials with Wind for Schools found the school's focus to align perfectly with their program's mission.

Members of the charter school's student council helped to assemble the blades and to attach them to the nacelle, under expert supervision.

The wind turbine will require little maintenance. Martin said the blades are designed to last 20 years, and once a year, the turbine must be inspected using binoculars.