

Donated wind turbines surprise church, school with lower bills, small size and quietness

by Beth Loechler | The Grand Rapids Press

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GRAND RAPIDS -- It started with a phone call last spring. "You're going to get a windmill," benefactor Peter Wege told St. Anthony of Padua's pastor, the Rev. Mark Przybysz.

Today, the rooftop wind turbine spins with the breezes, lowering the electric bills at the Catholic church and school with every revolution. An identical one does the same atop Grand Rapids City High/Middle School.

"When the environment and education come together, those are some of Mr. Wege's favorite projects," said Ellen Satterlee, executive director of the Wege Foundation, which funded the purchase and installation of the Swift Wind Turbines, built locally by Cascade Engineering.

"This is more of his legacy. He wants the younger generation to be exposed to this green-built environment," she said.

At 7 feet in diameter, the black-and-white turbines are smaller and quieter than expected, school officials said. One is attached to a chimney at St. Anthony, 2510 Richmond St. NW, the other to the front of City High/Middle, 1400 Fuller Ave. NE.

"Once it went up, half the people didn't even notice it. I see that as a plus; it's not obtrusive," Przybysz said. "And it doesn't make any noise."

The turbines, which cost \$10,000 to \$12,000 including installation, can spin their way to about \$200 in energy savings each year, Cascade Engineering's Michael Ford has said. Demand is growing, he said, and significant tax breaks are available for investing in renewable energy.

In the couple of weeks since installation at St. Anthony, the turbine has generated enough power to charge more than 2,500 cell phones, according to the computer that monitors its efforts. The computer also records the wattage hours generated and the amount of carbon dioxide *not* produced as a result of wind power usage.



Watching it work: Checking the performance of St. Anthony of Padua Elementary School's wind turbine on a monitor in the school lobby are, from left, Anna McCartney, Josh Ford, Kyra Chase and Darius Cason.



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Unobtrusive addition: A rooftop wind turbine generates power for City High/Middle School not far from a group of 11th-graders on their lunch break.

"The neat thing that Peter does is he tries to get things out there for people to see and experience instead of just reading about them," said Przybysz, a friend to Wege. "He's a real forward-thinker."

At City High/Middle, the windmill is a visible reminder of "economicology," Wege's philosophy that businesses and organizations must be environmentally responsible. The philosophy is emphasized throughout the school. Students are composting food waste and selling compact fluorescent light bulbs.

Word appears to be spreading.

Just last week, Meijer got permission from the Walker Zoning Board of Appeals to install six Swift Wind Turbines on the roof of its headquarters on Walker Avenue. It also is planning similar additions in Grand Haven and Norton Shores.

No such permission was required in Grand Rapids.

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