

Arctic Explorer visits Nichols generator

by Tonia Goertz

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Monday, June 26, arctic explorer Will Steger, along with Kelly Scanlan, the state coordinator for the Minnesota Natural Legacy Campaign, and Amanda Bilek, the energy program associate for the Minnesota Project, were joined by Senator Gary Kubly, Representative Aaron Peterson, and Gary Wertish, the agricultural director for Senator Mark Dayton, when they visited Lake Benton.

This group viewed the wind turbine jointly owned by Jim and Joyce Nichols, Kelly and Cindy Nichols, and the children of both couples as part of a Renewable Energy Expedition designed to focus attention on global warming and the use of renewable energy sources.

Steger is a native Minnesotan who has been exploring the arctic since 1986 and said, "I have seen the damage being caused to the polar ice sheets at both poles caused by global warming. It is a very real, very serious threat, and there is hope in the use of renewable fuels to slow this process down."

Steger went on saying, "The purpose of this expedition across Minnesota is to encourage good policy and to educate our politicians on global warming and the fact that about 90 percent of Minnesotans want renewable fuels. It is about education for the public on the fact that self reliance on alternative energy sources is possible, but only if people make it an issue when they vote."

Steger stressed that, "Minnesotans have the resources to be self-reliant and to reduce their dependence on foreign energy sources and this will be critical to surviving global warming. Now we just need good policy to help ensure growth in this area."

Jim Nichols explained to the group that, "all of the towers here on the ridge were corporate owned until we purchased this one about a year and a half ago and so far there are only four other private generators in operation in the area."

While discussing the problems with private ownership of a tower Nichols said, "Corporations receive a 1.9 cent per kilowatt hour tax credit that is currently not available to people like me. We need the federal legislation changed to include private owners in the credit. We need the legislation that offers two years of tax breaks to the factories that make the parts for the towers extended so that they extend beyond just the initial start up into actual production so that we can quit outsourcing to other countries the manufacturing jobs and additional shipping costs. The up side though, is that every month when everyone else is paying their electric bill, we get to send a bill to Excel and get a check back in the mail for what we have produced."

Explaining, Nichols said, "This generator cost \$1.5 million that was borrowed from Bremer Bank in Marshall on a 20-year note and it pays for itself with a little left over. The tower is 250

feet tall to the center of the hub, and each blade is 110 feet long making it 360 feet tall when the blade is at the top of its arc. The generator has a 1.5 megawatt capacity or 1 million 500 thousand watts. Electricity for homes is sold by the kilowatt hour or one thousand watts per hour, and we are contracted to sell electricity to Excel Energy for 3.3 cents per kilowatt hour for the next 25 years.”

Nichols said, “I would like to see more farmers owning their own tower, it’s a steady income, not get rich quick, but steady and what other crop can you harvest and have instantaneous delivery to the market? With corn, we add value by producing ethanol, with wind we are harvesting the crop and shipping it in final form to market at the speed of light.”

The Renewable Energy Expedition also included visits to the Agri-Energy ethanol plant in Luverne, the MinWind biodiesel plant in Beaver Creek, and the Methane digester at Davis Dairies in St. Peter.

Steger is the author of four books: *Over the Top of the World*, *Crossing Antarctica*, *North to the Pole* and *Saving the Earth*, and recipient of many awards. For more information on Steger visit his web site at www.willsteger.com/ or the Will Steger Foundation site at www.globalwarming101.com.

For more information on the Minnesota Natural Legacy Campaign please visit their website at www.mnlegacy.com and for more information on the Minnesota Project please visit www.mnproject.org.



(l.-r.) Senator Gary Kubly, Agricultural Director Gary Wertish from Senator Mark Dayton's office, Will Steger, and Representative Aaron Peterson listen to Jim Nichols explain the differences between his tower and the Enron towers. — LB News photo by Tonia Goertz