

Harbec Inc. harvests the wind

Company's new tower helps to save costs, environment

By Todd Grady
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(December 31, 2002) — Bob Bechtold is turning more than just a profit at Harbec Plastics Inc.

Bechtold has erected a 130-foot wind turbine next to his plastics injection molding company in Ontario, Wayne County.

The "gentle giant," as Bechtold calls it, is visible to drivers on Route 104.

Bechtold expects the turbine to turn the wind blowing off Lake Ontario into 450,000 to 500,000 kilowatt hours of electricity annually, or 25 to 30 percent of the power needed to run Harbec's operations.

Producing environmentally friendly energy is not new to Harbec. The company built a small cogeneration power plant that turns waste generated by the production of electricity into heat and air conditioning.

"Harbec as a company believes that it's best to make economic decisions," said Bechtold, who is the company's president and founder.

He also uses a residential wind turbine to provide 60 to 70 percent of the power needed at his Webster home.

"The drive for me is the environment," Bechtold said. "The challenge is the economics. I always have had to figure out a way to make caring for the environment economically feasible."

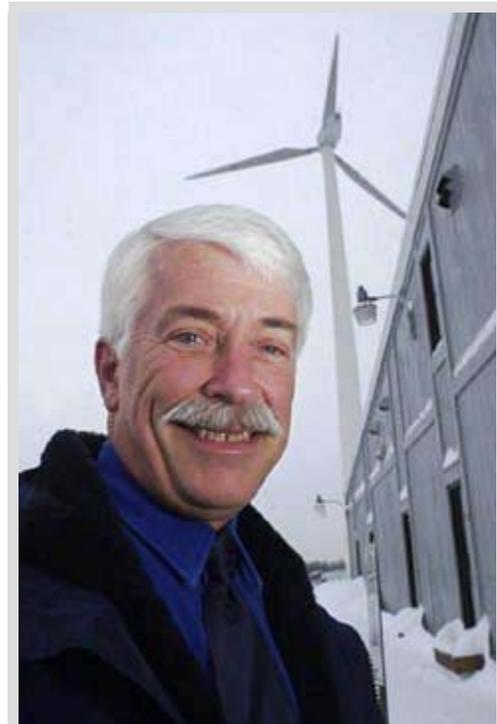
Clean fuel initiatives such as wind power and cogeneration are looked at favorably by the state Energy Research and Development Authority, which is working on a program to provide grants for commercial wind turbines. Wind power is also regarded as a valuable resource in New York, a state trying to boost its power generation.

"We're trying to minimize air pollution and water pollution," said John Saintcross, a project manager for the energy authority. "Wind just happens to be a resource that has come down in cost."

Business owners such as Bechtold are zeroing in on the cost savings. Bechtold expects his company's utility bills to decrease by \$50,000 a year, thanks to the 250-kilowatt turbine, which was built by German manufacturer Fuhrlaender AG.

He found financing to cover more than \$1 million in upgrades, \$350,000 of which was for the windmill project.

"I think I may be the only injection molder in New York state who can go out to his customers and talk about energy costs going down in a business where it's a very significant cost of doing business," Bechtold said.



AIMEE K. WILES

Bob Bechtold, CEO of Harbec Plastics in Ontario, Wayne County, says the company's new windmill, in background, is "a 10-year dream come true." His goal is to reduce his utility costs and help to save the environment. [Day in Photos]

Bechtold expects the wind turbine to pay for itself in seven to eight years, assuming there is no increase in energy costs. He expects to recoup the cost of the cogeneration plant in eight to 10 years.

Cost-efficient energy is just one way Harbec is trying to stay ahead of its competition. The company has fought through recessionary times and managed to turn a profit by coming up with creative solutions to customer problems.

"We've gone out and found new areas, new technologies, new opportunities ... where innovations in plastics or manufacturing were needed, came back, figured out and developed them, then took them back to the customer," Bechtold said.

Harbec's customers include General Motors Corp.'s hydrogen fuel cell operation in Honeoye Falls, where work continues toward high-volume manufacturing of fuel cell vehicles by the end of the decade.

Bechtold's clean power initiatives are on a much smaller scale but are designed to educate people about energy alternatives.

He set up a Web site at www.northerndevlopment.com to track the results of his clean energy projects and provide alternative energy information for other businesses.

"One small wind project in New York is not going to solve the world's problems with carbon and so forth and global warming, but you gradually have to shift people's thinking into 'this is a resource that you can use,'" Saintcross said.