

Winds of change at HCC



By Joe Tamborello / The Journal-Standard

Greenlee Textron senior engineer Keith Moffatt shows Highland Wind Technology student Cody Buse, left, Mick Badgett, center, and Robin Otten how to operate one of Greenlee's tool. Greenlee partnered with the college to outfit the the new center with the specialized tools needed for the program.

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By Claire O'brien

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Freeport, Ill. -

The mood at Highland Community College was exuberant Thursday, October 9, 2008, as officials broke ground for the first wind technology training center in Illinois.

About 200 people, many holding small, brightly-colored windmills, gathered on the east lawn of the Community Services Center at the college to listen to speeches, drink punch, and applaud.

The crowd had reason to cheer — the new training center will propel Highland into a key position in the field of wind turbine education, utilizing cutting-edge technology to meet the industry's demand for highly skilled workers. The facility will serve as the core of the new wind turbine technician program, which will offer the first associate degree in wind technology in the state of Illinois.

Even the weather seemed to be celebrating. The day was unseasonably warm and sunny, and only a few clouds were in the sky. Much of the crowd sat under a large orange and white-striped awning, listening to Highland officials and board members, private industry representatives, and politicians.

HCC president Dr. Joe Kanosky, emphasized that the training center will be funded entirely by donations made to the Highland Foundation, thanking the foundation for "continuing the dreams of the college's founders."

Highland board of trustees chair Rob Urish got a laugh when he gave a brief history of the project's beginnings.

“Well, they came to me and asked if we could do it, and I said ‘well, I don’t know anything at all about it... but — OK!”

Next to the awning, rows of elegantly designed tools were displayed on long white-covered tables. Three very small, solar-powered wind turbines spun around on the table, dwarfing a couple of tiny trucks placed beside them to provide scale.

Ajay Chandrasekhar, a representative of Greenlee, identified each of his company’s tools and explained their various functions to a strolling visitor. His colleague, Stan Noble, Greenlee’s vice-president of human relations, said the company was pleased to donate all the tools to the wind technician training program.

“We see this as an opportunity to establish a long-term relationship with these technicians,” Noble said cheerfully. “We hope they’ll buy their tools from us for the next 40 years. And after this class, there’s next year’s class — and the one after that.”

An EcoEnergy truck was parked next to the table of tools, near a group of students wearing bright orange T-shirts and green safety harnesses. These are the energy workers of the future, the men who will harness the wind — the first class of Highland turbine technicians.

The students listened carefully to Scott Anderson, dean of technology and business, as he talked about the future of Stephenson County.

“We know where we’re from. We’re from Freeport — and we’ll never forget our roots,” Anderson said.

Anderson was followed by EcoEnergy president, Shawn Gaffney, state senator Tim Bivins-R., U.S. Congressman Dan Manzullo, and Noble.

After the speeches were warmly applauded, the dignitaries donned white construction helmets and moved to the construction site, where they grabbed shovels. The crowd moved with them, ready for the big moment.

After a bit of premature shoveling, during which one dignitary joked “Who coordinated this group?” and another replied “We need some leadership!”, HCC Community Relations Director Pete Willging called out “One! Two! Three!”

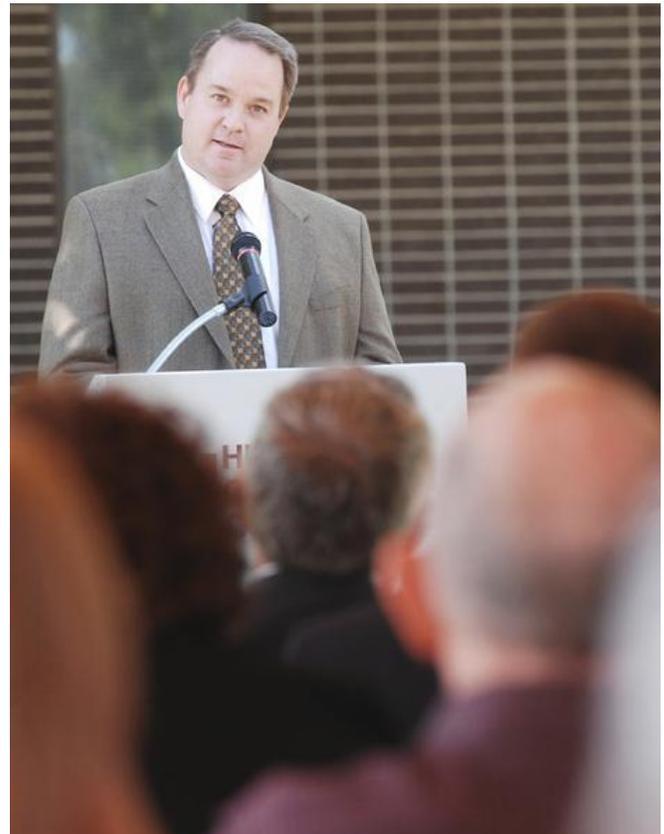


Photo by Joe Tamborello / The Journal-Standard
President of EcoEnergy Shawn Gaffney speaks Thursday at the Highland Community College Wind Turbine Technology Center groundbreaking.

And then dirt flew. Everyone cheered as the winds of the future blew through Highland Community College.
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