

Greener Pastures, Bluer Skies: Centre College finds helping environment comes at a cost

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first installment in a seven-part series that looks at how students, teachers, families and businesses, even a local city, are leading the charge for a more environmentally-conscious society. To see all the stories and videos from this series, click [here](#).

In a time when pinching a penny is second nature, some Centre College students have voted to voluntarily increase their tuition for the sake of the environment. "It's meant to purchase about 10 percent of the school's energy," said Christanna Schuman, a 2008 Centre graduate and immediate past president of the Environmentally Conscious Centre Organization.

Although the school's board of trustees has yet to pass this increase, which will tack on a \$20 surcharge to each student's tuition, a student vote passed with an overwhelming 82 percent of the student body. The extra \$20 will purchase renewable energy credits to help offset carbon pollutants. The board of trustees is expected to vote on the increase this fall.

"It's encouraging that so many people were willing to stand behind something to improve the economy and the environment," Schuman said. "The hydroelectric plant is so good for local community."

But that hydroelectric plant, the Mother Ann Lee Hydroelectric Station, formerly known as Lock 7 Plant, located on Lock and Dam 7 of the Kentucky River near Shakertown, almost was demolished four years ago. Before it was purchased by Lock 7 Hydro Partners, LLC - a three-man partnership - and Salt River Electric out of Bardstown, it was owned by Kentucky Utilities from 1927-2005. It was operable until 1999.

KU surrendered its federal license for the station in 2004 and planned to spend more than \$3 million to tear it down and fill the wells with concrete to seal it off.

David Brown Kinloch of Louisville is one of three with Lock 7 Hydro Partners, LLC, along with Bob Fairchild of Berea and David Coyte of Louisville. Brown Kinloch said when KU announced its plan to demolish the facility, there was an outcry from the public, particularly from this area.

"The bulk came from Centre," he added.

So to put their money where their mouth is, the students and faculty are pushing to use this facility to make Centre more eco-friendly.

"Students wanted their college to be green," Brown Kinloch said.

And so do some faculty members.

"The faculty voted to do it sort-of on a voluntary basis," said Rick Axtell, associate professor of religion and college chaplain. "The college has created a fund and faculty members can have a certain amount

deducted from their paycheck to go toward offsetting our carbon footprint, or give outright to the fund."

The deductions will start in January, he said.

"It's a way for the faculty to not only show its support of student-led initiatives, but expresses their own sense that we needed to be conscious of our carbon output and find ways to invest in alternative energies," Axtell said. "We do hope that it will be a model that other institutions will want to follow."

And it's initiatives like these that help keep the Mother Ann Lee operating. Power produced by the station is sent to Salt River Electric through KU lines. These green energy credits are then sold to offset carbon outputs through the Green Energy program offered by KU and Louisville Gas and Electric. Fairchild describes this as "the opposite of pollution."

Mother Ann Lee Hydroelectric Station is the first Kentucky hydropower project - and one of only a few dozen nationwide - to be certified by the Low Impact Hydropower Institute. This means the station creates pollution-free energy, but also does not create significant adverse effects on fish, wildlife and other resources.

The station is powered by three turbine-generators with the capacity to turn out 2,040 kilowatts of power. It has an annual generation of 8,300 megawatt hours. When all generators are working, it uses 1 million gallons of water a minute. Each generator moves about 5,000 gallons of water per second.

Brown Kinloch said it can supply enough green energy credits for 1,000 homes when all three are working.

When Brown Kinloch and his partners bought the station in 2005, all three turbine-generators were inoperable. They had the first running again by March 2007, the second was going by October 2007, and they hope to have the third working again by December. At least one generator remains running at all times with water levels permitting.

Without customers purchasing these green energy credits, or without the cooperation of Mother Nature, the hydroelectric station wouldn't have a reason to exist. When water levels are too high or too low, they can't operate. And if the demand isn't there for green energy, they can't operate. Last summer's drought kept the station from running for three months.

"The extremes kill us," Brown Kinloch said. "It's a risk. Everything's a risk in life."

But this is what they want to do.

"We both got into this business because we're environmentalists," Brown Kinloch said. "We're doing this in Kentucky because no one else is. ... Somebody has to be a pioneer in an area."

Schuman and members of ECCO seem to be thankful someone is pioneering this field locally to help the school become greener.

"I don't think it's something that's going to stop at Centre," Schuman said of offsetting carbon outputs. "There's definitely room for improvement."

She added that ECCO is "constantly trying to make people aware" of their utility usage in general, too, - turning off the water while washing hands, taking shorter showers, hang drying more loads of laundry instead of using electric dryers, and using more eco-friendly detergents.

"I was just really proud for the (students) to pass it with such high numbers," Schuman said. "That makes a good statement about what people are willing to do and see it as a priority."

For Brown Kinloch and others invested in the Mother Ann Lee or helping the environment in general, it must remain a priority.

"This is going to have to be our future - renewable energy," Brown Kinloch said, adding this one plant isn't the solution to everything, but "it's the first of many steps to get that problem solved."

So you know

The Mother Ann Lee Hydroelectric Station is all manual for now. Owners hope by this time next year it will be fully automated. They also hope to work out a wireless Internet deal with the city of Burgin so data can be posted on their Web site 24 hours a day in real time.

Mother Ann Lee Hydroelectric Station previously was called Lock 7 Plant. The name was changed to Mother Ann Lee, a spiritual leader of the Shakers. Mother Ann Lee Hydroelectric Station is inaccessible by roads, which is rare. A boat ride must be taken to get to the facility.

Get informed

For more information on the Mother Ann Lee Hydroelectric Station, log on to www.kyhydropower.com.

For more information on how Kentucky Utilities customers can offset carbon outputs of their homes or institutions, log on to www.eon-us.com/green/default.asp. Customers can enroll in the program online or by calling (800) 981-0600.

To learn more about the Low Impact Hydropower Institute and hydroelectric plants certified by it, log on to www.lowimpacthydro.org/default.aspx.

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