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Elk Regional breaks ground for biomass project

Written by Katie Weidenboerner



Many local and state officials attended the groundbreaking ceremony and check presentation Friday afternoon at Elk Regional Health Center.

Friday afternoon many local and statewide officials were present for the groundbreaking ceremony and check presentation for Elk Regional's alternative fuel project.

"We will be the first health system in Pennsylvania to undertake an energy project of this magnitude," Elk Regional CEO/ Pres. Greg Bauer said.

The Elk Regional Health System Alternative Fuel Project involves the construction of a 5,600 foot facility and the purchase of Biomass combustion equipment. The facility will be located at the rear of the hospital next to the maintenance shop.

The health system's heating, cooling and sterilization systems are steam driven, and the energy is used everyday. The wood fired boiler will generate steam for these facets of the facility.

The project is a year in the making, and is projected to be completed in the fall of this year. The total cost of the project is \$2,306,304.

Elk Regional received a \$300,000 Community Facility loan from USDA Rural Development, and a second Community Facility loan for \$1,475,000. Additional funding for the project includes a PA Energy Development Authority Grant in the amount of \$500,000, and a USDA Forest Service grant in the amount of \$250,000.

Elk Regional grant writer Gwen Auman was recognized by all of the organizations involved for the hard work and dedication she injected into the project.

"This is a very unique thing, to put the Forest Service, USDA Rural Development, and the state of

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Pennsylvania all working on a project. It doesn't happen very often, but I want to tell you, to do something like that takes some talented individuals," PA state director USDA Rural Development Gary H. Groves said. "We respect the talents and dedication of Gwen Auman. She does an outstanding job."

The alternative fuel project is utilizing local companies in the design, construction and equipment purchase.

The local community benefits from the project as the wood products will be purchased locally and also through the Allegheny National Forest. The equipment is being purchased and installed through Advanced Recycling Products, and the biomass product will be transported by local entities.

The system will also be fueled by recycled materials such as hospital kitchen grease, maintenance greases, and shredded paper.

"I hope this will be a model and will be repeated around the district. We're in an area where we need to look at the resources we have and prepare for our future," Congressman John Peterson said.

The project will save Elk Regional approximately \$300,000 per year. It is projected that the alternative fuel program will reduce monthly energy costs by 75 percent in a short period of time.

"It is my opinion, this country is not far from an energy train wreck. Energy prices in this country are going to go up painfully, and we are not prepared for the future," the Congressman said. "When the next wave comes, those who have prepared themselves with alternative energy will be smiling. This institution will be positioned at just the right time when the spike comes. You'll be smiling, and we'll be smiling with you."

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