

EDUCATION

SHOREHAM-WADING RIVER

Students gear up for green energy

Architecture, engineering classes enter turbine competition

BY ALISON SNYDER | STAFF WRITER

Generally speaking, it's hard to keep a group of teenage boys focused on something for a significant stretch of time, or as Dave Driscoll puts it, "It's tough to keep them all on task."

But recently Mr. Driscoll, who teaches the architecture and engineering classes at Shoreham-Wading River High School, got to see an exception to that rule on a field trip to see green technology in use at Eastern Energy Systems in Laurel.

"It kept their attention the entire time," he said. It's true. More than two dozen students on the excursion remained focused as they got up close and personal with wind turbines and solar panels.

Mr. Driscoll's students were doing a bit of research for their own wind turbines they'll be building over this next week to enter a statewide competition to design the energy systems.

The May 30 competition will test how efficient each team's wind turbine is at collecting energy in a wind tunnel — and the turbines will also be judged for innovation and engineering.

"They're going to have to come up with their own way to get the most energy," he said.

Students in the architecture and engineering classes hope to learn through trial and error as they evaluate different designs and brainstorm different methods of building their turbines, said Mr. Driscoll, who decided to have students participate in the competition as part of a new "green energy" section of his classes he began this year.

"Based on the way the country and this economy is going, I feel this is one of the most relevant areas of technology for the kids to be addressing," he said.

And the teacher has definitely struck gold with his students. On their field trip, they listened intently as Jeff Lang, the director of wind technology



PETER BLASL PHOTO

Jeff Lang from Eastern Energy Systems in Laurel explains the advantages of solar power to Shoreham-Wading River High School students. The students will soon build wind turbines for a statewide competition.

at Eastern Energy Systems in Laurel explained the history of, and growing interest in, wind turbines as students sat and observed the island's biggest wind turbine in Calverton. He explained some of the technicalities of the industry, such as placement of wind turbines, the importance of height and the design of the blades.

Later, at a tour of the company headquarters in Laurel, he showed students more turbines as well as solar panels.

"Touch everything," he told the students. "That's why you guys are here." And they did, leaning on solar panels, spinning the blades of one wind turbine model and grabbing a glimpse

inside another.

Mr. Lang also took the chance to sell the students on the viability of green energy, giving them price comparisons on the cost of powering a home over the next 35 years using solar or wind instead of paying the monthly Long Island Power Authority bill.

He told students he could see half of them working in a green or environmentally related industry in their career.

"There's so many reasons to do it," he said. "The industry will jump-start the economy and create a whole host of job opportunities."

As the tour ended and Mr. Lang gave students a few final tips before design-

ing their wind turbines, one student, Pat Menezes, leaned over to his friend, Chris Catan, smiling.

"I've got an idea here," he said, going into an explanation of a turbine design he thought would have less wind resistance. Chris had an idea of his own: filling the turbine blades with helium.

Others were brainstorming on materials they could use for building their turbines after the tour, Mr. Driscoll said, and a couple of students even asked him about becoming engineers.

For now, however, they'll start small — but you never know where it all may lead.

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