



Photos by STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Clark College is nearing the end of construction on its east county classroom building, which includes rooftop solar panels and wind turbines. The renewable energy systems are primarily for educational purposes, but they will produce about half of 1 percent of the building's total energy consumption.

Turbines top new Clark College building

Environmental touches at east Vancouver site valued for their teaching capabilities

By ISOLDE RAFTERY
Columbian staff writer

Off Southeast 192nd Avenue, past an old gravel pit and an empty housing development, is the new Clark College building.

Amid brownish swaths of undeveloped land, the Clark College site at Columbia Tech Center stands out, regal in dark brick and modern with large window panes, solar panels and wind turbines.

On Monday, a large crane pulled up the first of two relatively small turbines onto the roof of the building, which is still under construction. The \$30 million, four-story, building is scheduled to be completed in April. It is expected to serve 1,000 students.

"We weren't serving the eastern part of the county as well as we could," Clark College

Projects Manager Jim Watkins said. "The eastern part of the county is located close to the high-tech industries in Washougal and Camas. There are a number of industries that would benefit."

Plus, Watkins said, some students were driving across the Columbia River to Mt. Hood Community College in Oregon instead of driving the 14 miles into downtown Vancouver to the main Clark College campus.

The classes in the 70,000-square-foot east county building will focus on biology, chemistry, physics, electronics and renewable energy sciences. With solar panels and turbines on the accessible roof, the building will also serve as a laboratory for those students.

The panels and turbines won't produce enough energy to make a real difference — about 2,660 watts of electricity a year, or about half of 1 percent of the building's energy consumption — but they will help students understand how they work.



The first of two wind turbines was installed atop the new Clark College building off Southeast 192nd Avenue Monday. Jarett Stone, left, and Erik Peterson of Metro Industrial Contractors installed the 4-foot turbine, which will be part of a laboratory for students learning about renewable energies.

Turbines:

From Page C1

The renewable energy systems are hooked up to cables that transfer energy into the rest of the building. Before reaching the building's electric grid, the energy is computerized so that students can see how much energy was produced and at what times.

The Portland-based Electrical Construction Company is wiring the building site.

Assistant Project Manager Dusty Long said his company launched its renewable department three years ago and noticed a surge of interest in wind turbines and solar panels a year and a half ago.

"Just about every job at least wants a quote on solar or wind," Long said.

Part of that is because Washington state requires that new government buildings have a "green" certification, known as the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. LEED comes in several standards — certified, silver, gold and platinum.

The Clark College building is officially

aiming for silver, Watkins said, but is several points into gold at this point in construction. Obtaining LEED certification requires building up points by adding solar panels and recycled materials or minimizing waste on the construction site.

"The state wants buildings that last a long time and that are as maintenance-free as possible," Watkins said. "They want as low an impact as possible on the building site."

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