

Local rancher looks to wind as a way to live responsibly with the environment

by Evan Ortega
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Global warming is a phrase that has been overused so much in our everyday vernacular that people have become desensitized to its meaning. With China putting a coal burning utility plant online at a rate of nearly one per week, it would be unfathomable to think that its by-product is not harming our environment. Chief Standing Bear (1834?-1908), a Ponca Native American Chief from the American mid-west, is known for saying “[Man’s] lack of respect for growing, living things soon leads to lack of respect for humans, too”.

Hondo resident Kevin Christiansen has taken a stand to what he sees as the right thing to do, living responsibly with as little pollution as possible, in order to leave a clean environment for his children and grandchildren. “I just thought, if one person at a time can cut down on our carbon footprint, it would make a difference,” said Christiansen. He points to the fact that oilman T. Boone Pickens invested \$300 million into wind power in the last several years which he was going to have all over West Texas. Many wind farms already dot the mesas of West Texas, which is one of the best corridors to capture wind in the country. “Unlike Pickens, I don’t have \$300 million to invest, but I figured I would do what I could as an average citizen,” added Christiansen.

Christiansen, who started off in ranching and applied hands-on conservation principles to improve rangeland and wildlife habitat, said that he took a look at a private home setup for himself and settled on a personal wind turbine Skystream 3.7 which is made by Southwest Wind Products in Flagstaff, Az. He discovered that a wind turbine is much more effective than solar panels because they generate electricity 24/7, and don’t use batteries, which he says are an environmental hazard. He chose Southwest Wind Products because he said, “They are not

only an American company, they continue researching the newest innovations.”

As he began to tell his friends and relatives about the product he had settled on, others jumped on board, seeking something similar for their homes. Before he knew it, Christiansen was ordering ten more turbines and decided to become a dealer. From that point on, he has been scheduling appointments every day. In fact, he only had a limited amount of time to talk with me, as he was on his way to yet another appointment.

By talking to him, one would assume the Green Revolution, a movement to retrofit modern technology to fit modern environmental responsibilities, had begun.

Currently, the U.S. Congress is attempting to push through legislation which would put caps on carbon emissions yearly, although it would merely reduce emissions by 17% by 2020, a snail’s pace, compared to the amount of pollution going into the atmosphere daily.

Many people have taken different sides on the argument of global warming, and, while it is true that the Earth is merely going through a cyclical change in its history, it would also be naïve to think that human impact was not playing a part.

Since the industrial revolution began in the mid-1800s, machines and factories have up until recently, relied primarily on carbon-emitting fuel, including coal and oil which emits carbon-monoxide. The country of India, with a population of over a billion, has within half a century become one of the largest and industrious people in the world. Their acceptance of the modern technological movement has led computer companies to relocate there and created a large middle class society. This Indian middle-class is projected to become the biggest segment of drivers in the world within the next 40 years.

Coupled with Japan and China, these Asian countries will surpass our American driving culture exponentially in the future. All the vehicles



PHOTO BY EVAN ORTEGA

Mike Frausto of RePower Energy stands alongside Bruce Rickert and Kevin Christiansen after Rickert’s new turbine was installed.

and machines which run on combustible engines in the world will surely cause much pollution within the next few decades.

People like Christiansen are frankly dismayed at these statistics and see that nothing will change if it is left in the hands of politicians, who are continually influenced by money from industry lobbyists. By installing personal wind turbines, the amount of electricity used per home is cut substantially. This cuts down on the user’s energy costs, at the same time reducing the strain on electricity plants, which in turn helps the environment.

Personal wind turbines re-

quire 1-2 acres and hill-top views for optimal use, though once they are installed, begin paying for themselves. Christiansen refers to a Medina Electric Cooperative statistic by GM Mark Rollans in the March 2009 issue of Texas Co-Op magazine, which said that electric costs are up 40% since 2002 and are expected to continue climbing.

Local resident Bruce Rickert, who had Christiansen install a turbine on his property on Wednesday, said that when he went to an alternative energy convention in Fredricksburg last week, he learned something interesting, “As I was looking at solar power energy systems to install in my house, the systems to fit my needs would have cost me well over \$90,000, compared to the wind turbines which saved me around \$75,000”. The system he was having installed was going to produce nearly all the energy his family was going to need and if it was a particularly windy day and his household was not using any power, he could essentially sell the power back to the grid.

RePower Energy installs concrete piers some three feet wide by eight-10 ft deep reinforced with a one-inch rebar cage. The towers are 45 ft. tall for most applications. The turbine generates 2,400 watts, which can supply from 40-90% of a home’s needs. It connects to a 20-amp breaker in the electrical service box below the meter. The three fiberglass-reinforced composite blades are 12 ft. in length. Included is an onboard computer and software that wirelessly transmits data to a home computer, so owners can track the production of electricity and alert technicians to any problems. It automatically shuts itself off in times of high winds.

Christiansen added that since initially researching a system for his personal use he has yet to reap the benefits, “You know, I’ve been so busy installing customers’ turbines that I haven’t even had time to install mine.”

Kevin Christiansen can be contacted at 830-931-5777.