



## Harnessing wind power



By Tom Holden, [tom.holden@dailytimes.com](mailto:tom.holden@dailytimes.com)

Area homeowners turn to private turbines to reduce energy cost. Left: Kevin Christiansen, left, and Frank Gaitan, use a wench to raise a 60-foot wind turbine on a ranch in Kerr County.

Kevin Christiansen has three reasons why he got out of the construction and real estate business two years ago and into the green energy business: His three children.

"I wouldn't call myself an environmentalist, but I am concerned about what we're doing to the environment and what kind of environment will be left for our kids," Christiansen said.

That's Christiansen started RePower Energy, a firm to outfit buildings with solar and wind energy turbines. Based in Hondo, his firm already has installed 59 private wind turbines throughout the state, including several in the Hill Country.

Texas leads the nation in wind energy, with a production capacity of 9,410 mega-watts from the state's 40, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

But since none of the windfarms are located locally, many private homeowners opt to have private turbines installed.

"I think it was a cost factor and an environmental factor," said Jim Growney, who contracted with RePower to install a 60-foot tall turbine capable of producing 2.4 kilowatts of energy on his hilltop ranch in Kerr County on Friday.

In building his new home, Growney said he's taken numerous energy efficient steps to help cut costs - including energy efficient siding and a rainwater capture system.

"Obviously the home construction business has been down across the board the last couple of years during the recession," said Derek Meier, of Hill Country M&M Construction, who specializes in energy efficient homes and who is leading the construction of Growney's home.

Christiansen's assessment of the business was the same, noting that many homeowners are interested in the long-term energy savings of wind or solar energy, but are weary of making the initial investment.

Christiansen said his wind turbines range in cost from about \$3,000 to \$18,000. The largest model takes about seven years on average to pay for itself in utility bill savings.

"It's not the solution for every homeowner," Christiansen said. "But if you have a good windy location and can make the investment, it's worthwhile in the long run."