

Gwen Bassetti: Locally-Grown Clean Energy

A Distributed Wind Case Study

A Wind Powered Home and Business

In Seattle, Gwen Bassetti is known as the “godmother of good bread.” Her title stems from 1972 when she founded one of the Northwest’s best known bakeries, Grand Central Baking Company. However, back at her ranch home in Goldendale, Washington, Gwen is also known for her wind turbine, which is a local landmark for community-inspired energy solutions. The 10 kW wind turbine generates about 12,000 kWh annually with average wind speeds around 10 miles per hour. A portion of that energy is used to irrigate over 100 Spokane apple trees on the property, offspring of a tree from a childhood home. In a good season, Gwen may take up to two tons of these apples to inspire her Grand Central Bakery kitchens.

Neighborly Inspiration

In 2003, Gwen was inspired to pursue wind energy options when she witnessed their neighbor, Ed Kennell, raise a 10 kW wind turbine next door. Kennell, an engineer who had been involved with the small wind industry since the 1970s, had moved to Goldendale to build his ideal retirement home integrated with renewable energy technology. Gwen decided that she too wanted to offset her electricity costs using the strong, steady winds of Klickitat County. Gwen stopped by the Northwest Sustainable Energy for Economic Development office near her bakery in Seattle’s Pioneer Square, and discovered that they had just formed Our Wind Cooperative, a unique business model that allowed landowners to pool their resources to secure funding and discounts. Gwen quickly joined.

A Home-Grown Renewable Energy Business

Jonathan Lewis was also a neighbor of Ed and Gwen who had recently moved with his family to Goldendale and started a small electrical contractor business. Entirely by chance, Lewis heard about Kennell’s wind turbine project and was inspired to lend a hand as a licensed electrician. Kennell’s wind turbine was Lewis’ first renewable energy project, Gwen’s would soon become his second project, and Jonathan’s company would go on to install over 60 solar and wind systems before becoming a part of Hire Electric Inc in 2009. Since then, Hire Electric’s renewable energy division has installed over 1.4 MW of renewable energy and now employs five full-time staff and four part-time staff who are trained in solar electric and small wind systems.



The 10 kW Bergey wind turbine provides about 30% of the farm and ranch’s annual electricity needs.

Photo source: NWSEED

“This whole experience was invaluable in launching my business and career in renewable energy.”

– Jonathan Lewis

Hire Electric, Renewable Energy Division

A New Tower in Klickitat County

The Bassetti wind turbine was installed in September 2004. However, before their wind turbine could become a reality, the Bassetti's had to navigate a permitting process that took almost 8 months. Challenges included recording the official wind speed on the property, receiving both aviary and archaeological surveys, and going through the county's conditional use permitting process that included public hearings.

Klickitat County has now implemented an Energy Overlay Zone to simplify the permitting process. Within the zone, small wind systems under 100 kW are permitted outright if they satisfy certain height and setback criteria; only an electrical permit is required.

Gwen's son and several local Goldendale contractors helped erect the tower by completing the necessary concrete, trenching, fencing, wiring, and crane work. These cost savings measures resulted in a total installed cost of about \$40,000. The turbine was funded through multiple sources, including program support from Northwest SEED, a grant from the US Department of Agriculture, pre-purchased green tags from the Bonneville Environmental Foundation, and the Bassetti family themselves.

In addition to reduced utility bills, the Bassetti's benefit from Washington State's renewable energy production incentive program, which reimburses the Bassetti's 12 cents per kWh generated, or about \$1,500 per year, until the program ends in 2020.

Recommitting to Wind Power

After nearly a decade of continuous performance, the wind turbine was showing signs of wear and was in need of repair. Hire Electric's diagnosis included a failed inverter, damaged furling cable, and minor blade wear that would cost about \$10,000 to repair, including the cost of a crane to lower the turbine to the ground. After receiving the first irrigation electric bills of the season, Gwen was motivated to move forward with the repair and get the turbine spinning again. She estimated that with the utility bill savings and state production incentive, the wind turbine would earn back this new investment plus \$5,000 over the next six years. The wind turbine landmark is now back on the horizon, quietly and reliably harnessing the local clean energy resource.



The wind turbine stands 120 feet tall as a monument to community-inspired energy solutions.

Photo source: NWSEED

The Northwest Wind Resource & Action Center provides timely, accurate information on wind energy issues in the Pacific Northwest. It is supported in part with funding from the U.S. Department of Energy and managed by Renewable Northwest, Oregon Department of Energy, and Northwest SEED. www.nwwindcenter.org.



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