

Legacy Member

K.C. Larson expands to meet customer needs.

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In a time of high energy costs and the "going green" trend, renewable energy has experienced a resurgence in demand and popularity.

K.C. Larson Inc., under the direction of president Keevin Larson, is able to help home and business owners utilize renewable energy, after the mechanical and electrical contracting company opened its renewable energy department in February.

Larson said he had looked into renewable energy systems before during times of high energy costs, but as energy prices fell, plans for the systems fell through.

However, at a staff meeting in 2006, he saw the current energy situation as different and decided to pursue renewable energy contracting.

"I was looking into the future and I did not see the same (drop in prices) happening," he said.

Today, K.C. Larson can install solar electric panels, wind turbines, solar hot water panels and solar swimming pool heating systems for residential and commercial customers interested in cutting energy bills.

Larson said the payback period for most of these systems is 5 to 7 years. However, he said that solar hot water panels have a quicker payback period, since the panels are 75 to 80 percent effective at transferring heat into energy for use.

The payback comes from "locking in" energy prices, meaning that the cost for the energy produced does not rise, whether or not other energy costs, such as fuel and propane, rise.

"The more (energy) you generate, the more you're locking in your price," Larson said.

He also speculated that solar panels and wind turbines will increase the value of a property as energy costs continue to skyrocket.

"People are looking for this," Larson said.

Larson is hoping to help future renewable energy engineers and designers by working with Marc Bridgens, assistant dean of construction and design technologies at Pennsylvania College of Technology, to find ways to integrate renewable energy systems into the school's curriculum.

"With this whole new onslaught on energy management and resources there's going to be a need for individuals that can not only troubleshoot and work on it, but also can design it," Bridgens said.

Bridgens met Larson at a workshop the college was hosting.

"There was a workshop that we were holding on sustainability and he attended," Bridgens said. "After that we had the opportunity to talk about what's being taught now and what's being talked about now."

Bridgens said the contractor is doing the right thing by introducing and educating the public about renewable energy

systems.

"This needs to start somewhere," he said. "(K.C. Larson) is leading in the correct direction."

However, Larson said some people have been having problems getting approval from zoning boards, which are not familiar with renewable energy system codes.

David Pfeil, who owns the Inn at Hickory Run in Kidder Township in Carbon County, is one of these people. His background in thermomechanical engineering made him familiar with renewable energy, and he is hoping to install a 115-foot-tall wind turbine at the bed and breakfast.

"(My background) made me more comfortable with the concepts and I felt confident that installing the right product would work," he said. "I feel comfortable with the technology."

When searching for a contractor to install the system, the Montoursville native came across K.C. Larson.

"K.C. Larson was one of the names that came up," Pfeil said. "Since Williamsport is close (to Kidder Township) and since they have experience installing turbines and were a Pennsylvania vendor, it all kind of came together. It was kind of natural for me to give them a ring."

However, Pfeil's installation hit a snag when a neighbor complained about the system and resurrected an old law which required he show that the Inn would suffer without the system. Despite ordinances in neighboring townships allowing for such wind turbines, Pfeil's project was placed on hold.

Pfeil was able to work out his troubles by using his right to produce "curative amendments" and introducing a new ordinance allowing for such systems, which was passed on June 19.

He is hoping to start construction on the turbine next month.

Larson said such inconsistencies are common, and can be solved with state legislation creating an over-arching ordinance.

"There needs to be one law, so that (zoning boards) do this all the same way," he said.

Larson estimated his company employs 45 people and serves about 40 percent of the state. The company has been getting calls about their renewable energy systems from as far away as Pittsburgh.

Despite customer inquiries into total home renewable energy systems, Larson said that a house cannot be entirely heated and cooled using renewable energy.

"In Pennsylvania, there's just not enough solar energy," he said. "All you can do is supplement your energy used."