

Power to the people

Raum Energy's new wind turbine allows homeowners to generate power

BY CASSANDRA KYLE, THE STARPHOENIX MAY 22, 2009



Darryl Jessie of Raum Energy has his company releasing this new 3.5 kw wind turbine.

Photograph by: Gord Waldner, The StarPhoenix

When Darryl Jessie looks to the future, he sees his company's signature five-blade wind turbine dotted across Saskatchewan's vast landscape.

But his vision isn't limited to his home province. He also sees Raum Energy's turbines generating power in the rest of Canada, the United States, Europe and Africa. While Raum is only launching its new 3.5 kilowatt (kW) wind turbine today, Jessie said he expects to sell and install between 30 and 40 this year and hundreds in 2010, both in Saskatchewan and around the world.

"We don't want to be a mom and pop shop, we want to be a global player. We'd love to sell thousands of these units -- probably three or four years out -- a year," he said. "They're predicting in the U.S. alone a 30-fold increase in turbines of this size. In 2008, there were roughly 7,000 sold in the U.S. and they're predicting by 2013 there will be 200,000, so we want a significant portion of that pie."

Jessie, who incorporated his Saskatoon company in 2006, said the purpose of Raum's 3.5 kW wind turbine is to help the average home create as much power as it consumes, also known as net zero energy consumption. The 15-metre unit can work on or off a power grid and is ideally suited for farms, acreages and cabins, he said, adding his company receives calls about its products roughly every 10 minutes.

A SaskPower customer who purchased a turbine would be able to work with the utility and its net metering program, which monitors how much energy a personal power producer, such as a wind

turbine or solar panels, puts back into the power grid. If a customer makes more energy than he or she uses, a credit is placed on the customer's power bill.

"It's not just alternative energy for the environmental side, it's alternative energy to utility power," Jessie said. "You would never be independent of the grid completely because we interact with the grid through a net metering program, but the idea is if you can replace some of the utilities costs you've got with wind power, you have a sense of empowerment and it's also good economic sense."

The 3.5-kW turbine will produce between 6,000 and 7,000 kW hours a year and about 140,000 kW hours during its 20-year life, he said. When everything, including installation costs and a 35 per cent provincial rebate, is factored in to the \$12,500 price of the product, Jessie estimates it costs about seven cents per kW hour to own and operate the machine.

Jessie said if enough people generate their own energy with the product, the 3.5-kW turbine could make a big difference in provincial power use.

"We've got roughly 65,000 cabins and farms and acreages in the province and there's no reason why we couldn't put a wind turbine in every one of them," Jessie said. "When you distribute wind energy that broadly, it really helps the grid, we think, because we've got wind power all across the province -- somewhere, it's always blowing."

Wind turbine use is beginning to pick up across Saskatchewan, said Stewart Bengert, an engineer with SaskPower's independent power producer options group.

About 42 of the 47 customers on the net metering program use wind turbines, he said, adding the remainder produce their own energy from solar panels or a combination of solar panels and wind turbines. An additional 57 customers are working through the net metering program's application process.

"It seems right now the wind is a more efficient way of doing it. I don't know if solar has quite caught up to the efficiencies of wind," Bengert said.

The engineer said as more people harness wind power, the more popular it will become.

"I think it will gain momentum because I think as people see their neighbours with windmills -- especially in the rural areas -- as people see the windmills getting into it, it builds awareness," he said.

Raum Energy, located at 3718A Millar Ave., is officially unveiling its 3.5-kW product at an open house at its plant today between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.

ckyle@sp.canwest.com