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Alternative energy firm's site shows off 'green' systems

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Listening to Doug Mossbrook talk about his alternative energy company's new building, it's hard not to get caught up in the gospel of green as it's preached in Bristol, Ontario County.

Insulation? Four-inch thick cotton felt made out of used and shredded blue jeans.

Passive lighting? He shows off some major windows, made of glass that deflects high-angle rays (think hot, glaring summer sun) and lets in low-angle rays (think warming winter sun).

Automatic bathroom faucets? They have little solar panels that get their power from the bathroom overhead lights.

Flush toilets? Filled with filtered rainwater.

Every aspect of the place seems to have an energy-saving or generating purpose. The 20,000-square-foot building is being built on 100 acres on the floor of Bristol Valley, across the street from Eagle Mountain's current headquarters, a barn-wood sided building that blends into the bucolic neighborhood.

Two glass roof pyramids capture outdoor light for the new building, even on miserably gray days, and make the inside nearly brilliant. The giant pond in front of the structure will recycle cooling water.

In a rural valley where most structures are either wood frame or corrugated, the Eagle Mountain Center for Green Technology and Innovation stands out.

"It was important that I make a statement," said Mossbrook, 47. "I wanted it to be different."

When finished at the end of October, the building should use 65 percent less energy than a comparably sized new building, Mossbrook said. It uses Eagle Mountain systems, such as radiant heat in the floors, and other off-the-shelf technology. Total cost is projected to be \$2 million.

The structure would be the first building in Ontario County to get LEED certification, according to records of the U.S. Green Building Council.

"It's beautiful," said Mike J. Manikowski, director of economic development for the county. "Doug's making a statement with this building to show it can be done, and it can be done at not extraordinary cost."

The county kicked in a substantial incentive package: no sales tax on construction materials or equipment, no property tax on the building for the first five years and then four years of partial

reductions; no mortgage-filing tax. The package's value in the first three years adds up to \$167,674.

"There's not a better investment that we could make as a county than to invest in Eagle Mountain," Manikowski said.

Eagle Mountain also qualified for a 4-point interest-rate reduction for 10 years through a state program.

Once the building opens, Eagle Mountain plans to add 15 employees to its current 20. Some will stay in the original building, operating a separate business, Geo Corp., which installs Eagle Mountain's energy systems. The design and manufacture of these systems will move into the new building. In addition, there's room to branch out.

"We actually have classroom facilities," Mossbrook said. "Part of our goal is to teach people what it means to be energy efficient."

Builders interested in Eagle Mountain's geothermal, radiant heat or solar options could learn how to use them or apply them in new ways.

"Even though we just sell mechanical equipment, we want people think big picture," Mossbrook said.

He envisions seminars for local colleges, as well as ones for people in the trade to gain certifications. About 3,600 square feet of the building will be devoted to education.

The education emphasis is somewhat ironic as Mossbrook himself never completed a college degree. He decided to work for himself right after high school and then took night courses to placate his parents. After a while installing solar energy systems, though, he realized what he wanted to know about alternative energy was better learned by reading and researching on his own.

He built his on-the-job expertise over nearly 30 years until he can now be described as a self-trained engineer, specializing in the field of hydronics, or the use of liquid to move energy. The new building seems to have only honed his sense of scientific inquiry: he's including a lab for his own research.

The education wing's roof will be green, meaning plants will grow on it, and it will have a patio where employees can move their workstations in fair weather. The location has a grand view of the Bristol Hills.

Those hills first drew the Ontario, Wayne County, native to Bristol Mountain for skiing as a teenager and later to live and work in Bristol. His wife, Kim Mossbrook, is chief financial officer of the company.

Doug Mossbrook said he considered moving the company to expand. But he and his staff ended up preferring to stay in Bristol. They enjoy mountain bike trails on the hilly side of Bristol Valley Road, and nature trails on the valley floor.

Manikowski summed up the decision this way:

"They're a 21st-century, renewable-energy, sustainable-resource, young engineering company that loves to be in Bristol."

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