

Pellston Public Schools reaps energy rewards

By Ryan Bentley News-Review Staff Writer

PELLSTON — After upgrading aging equipment in its buildings three years ago, Pellston Public Schools is enjoying energy savings that are offsetting much of the district's cost for the improvements.

“We're still paying for it, but the long term solution will be that we're paying a lot less than we could have been paying,” said Pellston superintendent Bill Tebbe.

In 2004, Sheren Energy Services of Traverse City helped Pellston school officials devise a plan for updating climate control, lighting and water treatment and heating systems, one which would bring energy savings to help make up for project expenses.

Pellston used a bond sale with a 10-year repayment period to finance the \$560,000 project at its two school buildings, with Sheren completing the work in 2004. With interest, annual payments on the bond debt are about \$70,000.

Compared to 2003 utility costs, Tebbe noted that the project has brought the district a total savings of \$147,490 so far. The district projects its ongoing yearly energy savings will be in the \$40,000-60,000 range.

“Not only have we been able to improve the function and comfort of the buildings, but we are also able to counteract the escalating energy costs with Sheren's overachievement on the projected energy savings,” the superintendent said.

In 2006, the district's electric consumption was 35 percent lower than in 2003, with natural gas usage 52 percent lower.

Facility improvements included items such as better lighting, climate controlled thermostats, upgraded boiler system, updated hot water radiant heating, improved water treatment and heating and automated, motion-activated vending machines that shut down at times when the building is unoccupied.



These boiler units at Pellston Middle School/High School were installed as part of an energy-saving mechanical upgrade project in the district three years ago, replacing a single larger boiler. Depending on the demand for heat and hot water, the compact gas-powered units can run individually or in conjunction with one another — allowing for better efficiency. (Ryan Bentley/News-Review)

Metal halide light fixtures in the high school gymnasium were replaced with more efficient fluorescent models, with motion-activated lighting installed in some lesser-used rooms. The high school/middle school building's old boiler was replaced by four smaller gas-powered units — requiring a fraction of the total space — that can operate individually or in conjunction with another depending on the demand for heat and hot water.

A computerized remote-monitoring system for the new systems allows Sheren to identify and correct minor issues before they demand costly repairs, and also provides up-to-date energy usage reports for the superintendent.

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