

Solar panels energize school

Cochrane High adds wind turbine for green power

KELLY BENEDICT
CALGARY HERALD

Cochrane High School is using sustainable energy to usher in a new era of schooling in a project that has drawn the applause of well-known environmentalist David Suzuki.

Students and teachers have raised enough funds to install 30 solar panels and a wind turbine to generate their own power at the school.

The school will hold a dedication ceremony Feb. 2 at 2 p.m. and guest speakers will include Suzuki and Alberta Environment Minister Guy Boutilier.

"We were a little star struck, at first," says Stephanie Bennett, a science teacher at Cochrane High School, who adds students and teachers are "deliriously happy" to see such interest.

The project began in June 2000 with a Grade 10 unit on climate change that included solar and wind power.

Bennett said she and her fellow science teacher Earl Binder were tired of talking about how to reduce energy consumption and decided to do something about it.

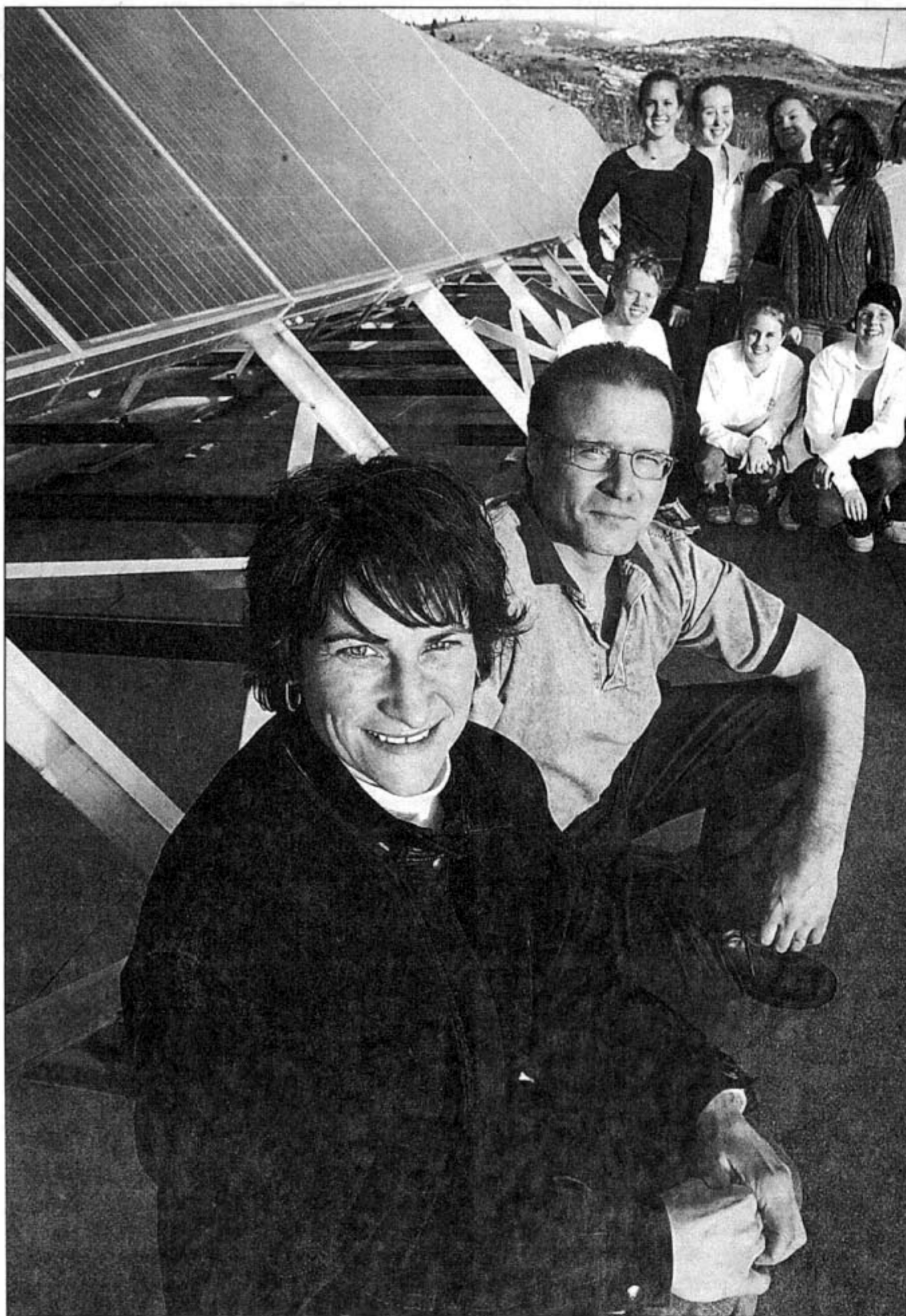
"Our system supplies one per cent of our total electrical usage at this point," she says, stating the solar panels and wind turbine are only the first part of their three-part environmental plan.

"We have yet to see another school in the province with the same set-up as us," says Bennett, who says many schools use solar power to heat water but not for overall energy consumption.

Part two will have the school changing its football score clock over to solar power, at a cost of about \$9,000.

The next is to increase the percentage of energy produced through alternative means.

The plan would not be as successful without such impressive involvement from the students, who got involved in the project last February.



Colleen De Neve, Calgary Herald

Cochrane High School teachers Stephanie Bennett and Earl Binder worked with students to get solar panels for the school.

The 12 students who have been helping have raised more than \$47,000 in the last six months.

"These kids just blow our minds," says Bennett, who says the students are doing this on their own time.

"They aren't getting credits or class time for this," she says, praising their involvement.

Katy Eso, a Grade 12 student at the

school who has been involved in the project since February, says she joined because it seemed like an interesting challenge.

"The teachers have been great," she says, noting the project has encouraged her to apply at Acadia University.

"I just hope that when we leave, other students will step in and follow in our footsteps," she says.