

David Suzuki lauds CHS efforts

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The roar was deafening.

You would have thought the likes of singer Ozzy Osbourne or actor Brad Pitt sauntered into the lyceum at Cochrane High School Feb. 2.

But it wasn't a rock legend or a famous actor that caused such a stir. It was Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki, who came to the high school with a message of congratulations for acting as what he described, "a role model," for other schools and institutions across the country.

"I thought 'Oh my God, that is an exciting model for kids and adults across the country,'" said Suzuki, adding he plans to make mention of Cochrane High's \$47,000 sustainable development initiative to many of the groups he will be talking to in the future.

"Well done, Cochrane' is what I'm going to say. I think this is a very inspiring project and I hope Calgary students take as much initiative."

Suzuki was accompanied by Alberta Environment Minister Guy Boutilier to offer congratulations and words of wisdom to the school's entire student and teacher population.

What began last January as a vision of science teachers Stephanie Bennett and Earl Binder — to expand learning about renewable energy resources outside the classroom — exploded into reality after \$47,000 was donated by the environmental community and residents of the area to install two large solar panels and a wind turbine on the roof of the school.

The project would eventually generate electricity to not only power the school, but also contribute to the general grid of Alberta, allowing the school to receive credits back from the provincial government.

And now that the project is in place, Bennett, Binder and their crew of 15 students are basking in national attention, which came to a head at the dedication ceremony at the school Feb. 2.

Bennett's voice cracked as she addressed the audience to speak about what the past year has meant to her.



Renowned environmentalist David Suzuki, accompanied by provincial Environment Minister Guy Boutilier, emerges from a conference room in the Cochrane High School office Feb. 2. Both came to congratulate students and staff for a job well-done on a project that saw 24 solar panels and a wind turbine installed on the school's roof. *CTimes photo by Samara Cygman*

"This has been probably one of the most incredible teaching, learning experiences in my career. It has been made possible, firstly by these 15 students," she said, gesturing to the row seated at the front.

"Dr. Suzuki, from the moment you said 'yes', our lives changed here. We've had so

save the planet by engaging in gigantic schemes. It's going to be the millions and millions of people who do the types of projects you did," he said.

"The solar panels and wind turbine are just a small step but a very important one. It's our future."



Cochrane High teacher Earl Binder, left, helped install the solar panels on the roof of the school last July, along with Ken Newel, a business development manager with the company Soltek Powersource that distributes the panels. *CTimes file photo*

much attention brought to our project and it's all because of you.

"This all started with wanting to make a change — you don't have to have 90 per cent in science or a Ph.D.," she said.

"We have been the first in the province to start embarking on enormous change and it all started here."

Her comments received a standing ovation.

The 15 students involved in the project not only have been nominated for the 2005 Emerald Awards, but the Canadian National Geographic-endorsed Canadian Environment Award and the Calgary Awards.

Suzuki said not only should the high school be applauded, but the whole community as well.

"It's a community effort and I think you are all to be congratulated. We're not going to