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## **Solar project green beacon to other schools; School powered by some solar energy thanks to students; [Final Edition]**

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### **Abstract** (Document Summary)

Photo: CANADIAN PRESS / [Denyse Skipper], left, and [Julian Chesterman], both Grade 12 students at Cochrane High School, raised over \$47,000 with their classmates to pay for solar panels that generate a portion of the Alberta school's electricity. The pair proudly show off the panels, above.

**Full Text** (890 words)

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Ran with "SOLAR PROJECT TIPS" which has been appended to the end of this story

A group of Alberta teens who have powered part of their school with solar energy is hoping the project will be a green light for others to follow.

Students at Cochrane High School are using solar panels and a wind turbine to create alternative energy for their classrooms.

"We're trying to do something no high school has done to this extent. It's a new era in the creation of energy within schools," said Denyse Skipper, a Grade 12 student at the school just west of Calgary.

Although other schools in Canada are trying to make use of alternate energy, this is the first project pushed forward by students and teachers. More than \$47,000 was raised in a matter of months to cover the cost of 30 solar panels and a small turbine.

That tells 17-year-old Julian Chesterman there's a lot of public interest in sustainable technologies.

"I think a lot of people support the concept," said the Grade 12 student, who plans to study engineering at university.

"While they don't have the money to set up their own house using solar panels or some other form of sustainable development, they are quite prepared to make a donation to support an initiative to do so."

The project will generate about 3.3 kilowatts of electricity. That's enough to power a small home, but it will only account for about one per cent of the high school's energy needs. Still, it's an important start.

"Setting an example is always one of the most important things in promoting the (adoption) of new technology," said Chesterman, adding that it's good the venture is taking place in oil-rich Alberta.

And he says it's time for the debt-free provincial government to push the envelope on promoting sustainable energy.

"We're not that progressive in some regards," said Chesterman. "We have the money to pursue these technologies. In another few years, with more investment in them, they will be on par cost-wise with more traditional means."

The project began as the brainchild of science teachers Stephanie Bennett and Earl Binder, who wanted the curriculum concepts of energy conservation to be more than just dry preaching about the threat of global warming and greenhouse gases.

Bennett was blown away by how the 15 students who adopted the plan took charge.

"These kids are doers," said Bennett, noting that they didn't get course credit for the dozens of hours they invested on their own time.

"They wanted to increase awareness about renewable technology, they wanted to act as role models to other schools, towns and provinces," she said.

"I'm sure that's going to come about. It's just a matter of getting the word out."

A template for other schools to follow is found on the school's website ([www.blinddrop.com/chs\\_solar/](http://www.blinddrop.com/chs_solar/)) and outlines the steps taken by the students and teachers.

A large portion of time was spent going through the paperwork and bureaucracy for grants and regulatory approval.

The biggest stumbling block was getting approval to hook into the electrical grid, a process that took months.

Three other schools in the Calgary area have expressed an interest in following the Cochrane plan.

And the teens hope that's just the beginning.

Their trailblazing efforts are being applauded by no less than David Suzuki, Canada's best-known environmentalist.

"Youth has got to be involved and here's an inspiring example," said Suzuki, who learned of their work when Bennett sent him an invitation to the project's dedication ceremony.

"If you decide to do something, you can achieve a lot," said Suzuki, who hopes the enthusiasm can be maintained as many of the teens involved leave high school and go on with their lives.

#### SOLAR PROJECT TIPS

Figuring out how to set up a working solar project at school can be daunting. Here are tips from students and teachers at Cochrane High School:

Involve members of the school division's maintenance staff/ grounds crew very early. These people are invaluable in installing any system, can point out potential problems and help get an engineer's report to install anything on a school roof.

Seek out a sustainable development company that might want to partner with the school right from the beginning.

Do a feasibility study of your school site to help decide on an appropriate project. Take that proposal to your local superintendent and get approval to go ahead.

Estimate the total cost. This can be tricky because it needs to include labour, future operations and unforeseen costs. The company you work with should help sort that out.

Fundraising: Go door-to-door to seek local business support, host an open house at the school to let the community know.

Apply for grants. Have one person handle all the paperwork. Business grants are often easier to get than government money, so try them first.

Begin applying for electrical permits and an engineer's report when you have raised about 75 per cent of your target. This keeps the momentum going.

Source: Sustainable Development Project, Cochrane High School

**[Illustration]**

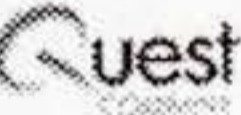
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