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Solar swim events highlight the use of solar-thermal technology

Summary: The events drew a diverse crowd and emphasized the RFC's campus/community partnership.

(May 27, 2011)-Several inaugural events marked the successful operation of the 32-panel solar-thermal array installed at the Regional Fitness Center (RFC). The system is heating the recreational pool, helping to save costs and energy. Two solar swims, one open to the community and one for students, were held, and the RFC hosted a seminar for senior citizens. The Students Using Natural Energy (SUN-E) team responsible for these gatherings hopes a trend has been started.

Team member Melinda Kawalek '13, Eagan, environmental studies and political science major, reports that the swims drew a total crowd of about 100 people, swimming in water heated by the sun and enjoying free pizza, speakers, and a poolside DJ. So many people came out for the student swim, Kawalek said, that the rising water level even caused a bit of flooding.

Addressing a lobby full of spectators, the speakers, besides Kawalek, included Karen Mumford, assistant professor of environmental studies, Troy Goodnough, Morris's sustainability coordinator, and Dan Thiede, representing Minnesota Schools Cutting Carbon. Senator Amy Klobuchar sent video greetings, which may be viewed on [Morris's YouTube channel](#).

Kawalek's primary role in the SUN-E project was overseeing development of the RFC kiosk. Although currently operational, the kiosk, a collaborative effort between McKinstry, creator of Morris's Carbon Management Tool, and Quality Attribute Software (QAS), Kawalek says, should be fully functioning by summer.

The kiosks in the Welcome Center and at the RFC will both show live data about temperature at each juncture of the system, carbon dioxide output, and the amount of energy produced by the solar panels over time. A diagram of the pool and the panels detailing the heating system as well as information on other green energy platforms on campus will complement the live data.

Kawalek's work on this project may be over, but she says that the memory of all of the Morris sustainability people together in one place, for a brief and happy time, will linger forever. She would especially like to see the beanbag toss the team created become a permanent Morris tailgating activity. Players used beanbags painted to mimic either the solar panels or the sun for a game of "toss the sun on the panel."

Team member Seth Elsen '12, Shelton, Washington, a political science and American Indian studies major, took on the role of community outreach coordinator and used this opportunity to arrange a senior citizen solar seminar at the RFC. Fifteen "really interested and passionate seniors showed up," he said. Opening the event, Morris Mayor Sheldon Giese recounted the campus-community partnerships behind the project and especially enjoyed the input from this curious group. Wayne Morford, RFC director, reported on cost savings and described future plans such as heating the showers, and Karen Mumford explained the science of solar-thermal heating and summarized Morris's other green initiatives. In

the future, Elsen hopes to keep the project relevant with tabling at community events and as a presence in parades.

Although the grant period is officially over, Kawalek and Elsen will stay involved with the SUN-E Team until after the Upper Midwest Association for Campus Sustainability (UMACS) conference to be hosted on the Morris campus in September, at which they are both presenters. Afterwards, the team will regroup, reassess, and strategize. In the meantime, they, with media point man Dana Droog '11, Mobridge, South Dakota, are nearing completion of a documentary chronicling the life of the solar-thermal project.

Funding for this project was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR).

Enjoy the [photos](#).

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