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Jennifer Miller '10 helps Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center develop tour

Summary: Miller worked with PWELC in Spicer to develop a self-guided tour of facilities demonstration projects.

(December 7, 2010)-Anyone who wants to become more knowledgeable about renewable and sustainable energy sources should take a trip out to the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC), in Spicer. University of Minnesota, Morris environmental studies major Jennifer Miller, a senior from Eagan, has been working with PWELC to create a self-guided tour for the center.

Over the past few years, PWELC has seen a surge in their number of walk-in visitors, and there have not been any printed or audio materials available for them, which is something Miller is trying to remedy. She's worked closely with PWELC Director Dave Pederson to create a tour pamphlet and fact sheets that describe each of the renewable energy features of the tour. They hope that these materials will be of use to people who don't have time for a full tour or who want to take a tour when there are no tour guides available.

According to Pederson, PWELC's objective with the Renewable Energy Tour Project "is to model the use of our region's abundant, locally available, renewable energy and to help raise awareness of the connection between our energy use and the environment. Environmental stewardship in our times includes careful attention to energy conservation, energy efficiency, and the use of renewable energy."

Miller said that she's learned a lot throughout the course of the experience, especially about the energy technologies employed at PWELC. She worked all summer on the project and has continued to work on other aspects of the project including audio clips that describe these renewable energy assets. She enjoyed working on the publicity side of things, which she describes as a great learning opportunity, a "facet of environmental education" that she hasn't been exposed to until now.

She was most surprised with how applicable the technology is to people's houses. Miller said her main goal with this project is to "increase awareness of renewable energy technology and how they can be implemented into residential homes." Something that seems so futuristic or difficult to work into home planning isn't actually that difficult at all. Miller's father is building a retirement home, and she was able to advise him on solar panel installation. She says they're fairly easy to install and pay for themselves over time.

PWELC is a regional center for environmental education and outdoor recreation which operates almost entirely with renewable energy. They have been working hard over the last six years to be using 100 percent renewable energy resources by the end of 2010, a goal that Pederson says is "a goal that we have substantially attained." They offer demonstrational projects of a variety of innovative energy sources, including a 20 kilowatt Jacobs wind turbine, a 12 kilowatt solar photovoltaic system, a solar thermal system, and a biomass boiler and pellet stove, which are all scaled for homeowners, small businesses, schools, and farms.

Miller has been assisting the PWELC through the Center for Small Towns, a community outreach program housed at the

University of Minnesota, Morris that serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University of Minnesota. Small towns, local units of government, K-12 schools, nonprofit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize the Center's resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. Their mission is to focus the University's attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota's small towns with locally identified issues by creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students.

If you'd like more information on the topic of this article, please contact [Allyce Amidon](#).

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