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November 09, 2009

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Teachers get a lesson in energy conservation

By Gillian Knox
Hometown News Group

Recently, nine Waunakee School district teachers participated in a KEEP School Building Energy Efficiency Education course at Prairie Elementary School.

This course, designed for teachers who want to incorporate energy efficiency and conservation teaching opportunities in their classroom, was taught by Jim Jenson, an adjunct faculty member of UW-Stevens Point and a Community Education Coordinator at Madison gas company and Electric (MGE).

"Teaching about school building energy efficiency is important at every grade level. I work with preschoolers and am learning ways to incorporate ways to teach energy efficiency and conservation to them in the most basic ways," said Jen Johnston. "All of us can make a difference in our classrooms, and no one is too young to learn good habits such as the ones taught in this course."

As part of the course, the teachers participated in an energy audit of Prairie Elementary, led by Jennifer Everhart of Focus on Energy and Jerry Tinberg, Energy management Specialist with North American Mechanical Inc. (NAMI), where they learned about the schools' building energy systems and how they can use the school itself as a teaching resource.

"The energy audit pointed out how some of the systems worked," Tinberg said. "And I also did a little class presentation about the energy savings and how important they are to the school district and how we achieved that."

Betsy Ippolito, a high school science teacher who participated in the course, said, "It was very eye-opening to have Jerry and Jennifer physically walk us through Prairie Elementary and show us the multitude of ways that our district is striving to save money and resources. It is heartening to see that financial savviness and environmental concern do not have to be mutually exclusive."

NAMI has a full-service contract with the school district that covers HVAC equipment (heating, ventilation and air conditioning). Along with installation and maintenance, part of the contract has an energy component.

As an energy specialist, Tinberg works closely with the school district to help keep equipment maintained and making sure that it is operating properly.

"Just making sure that everything is working properly is really a big part in saving energy," Tinberg said. "We are also working on scheduling around activities. During the school day, everything is running, but afterwards we are scheduling activities based on what part of the school buildings need to be heated or cooled."

According to Ippolito, the course has inspired several of the high school teachers who participated to start the process of becoming a Green and Healthy School. This is a program sponsored through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Department of Natural Resources, which focuses on health, safety and an environmentally friendly learning environment.

"I have learned a ton of information about the ins and outs of energy efficient schools," Johnston said. "I hope to take some of these lessons home to incorporate into my daily living. This has been an eye-opening experience for me."

"It takes everybody to save energy, and the school district has wonderful cooperation with that and has done a great job," Tinberg said.

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