

Their Power is Blowin' in the Wind: Environmental couple given approval for backyard turbine



Patricia and Jeremy Coxon plan to install a three-blade wind turbine atop a 100-foot tower in their backyard. The power it generates could conceivably provide all their electrical needs and create a net balance on their monthly bill. (By Grace Schneider, The Courier-Journal)

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Patricia Coxon traces her passion for the natural world to her childhood, playing in the woods near her parents' Iroquois Park-area home in southern Louisville.

The 37-year-old mother, a microbiologist and president of an alternative energy company, still lives close to the woods in rural Floyd County. And soon the home she shares with her husband, Jeremy, and 3-year-old daughter, Jade, will become something of a neighborhood landmark.

Extending above the tree line south of Starlight will be a wind turbine that the couple, founders of SunWind Power Systems Inc., will install in their sloping backyard on Hanka Road.

The pair gained approval from the Floyd County Board of Zoning Appeals to install the three-blade device atop a 100-foot tower. It will produce electricity for their home, which already features passive solar heating with a modest \$44 monthly electric bill.

The Coxons expect to cut the cost further, thanks to an agreement this summer with the Harrison County REMC, their electric utility, to allow net metering. That's when customers are credited for electricity they generate on site in excess of what they use.

Under laws in Indiana and Kentucky, investor-owned utilities such as Duke Energy must offer net metering, but providers that aren't under the jurisdiction of the states' utility regulatory commissions, such as Harrison REMC, aren't required to do so.

Patricia Coxon said she believes they are paving the way for others to try wind and solar power.

"Right now renewable energy is a buzzword. People believe global warming is something they need to be concerned about," she said.

The Coxons are still in the early stages of selling and installing wind turbines, solar systems and other energy-saving devices, and for now the two are the lone employees of the certified minority-owned business.

They've drawn no paychecks, but they predict the enterprise will grow rapidly and expect to have a staff working under them in a few years.

Since their start in late 2005, the two have sold eight large systems and an array of smaller energy-saving items, such as tubular solar skylights, to customers in Kentucky and Indiana.

One customer, Timothy Darst, an accountant, had SunWind install 11 solar panels on his Louisville Highlands home in February. Darst said he's pleased with the reduction in his energy bills and believes such systems will become more common as utility costs climb.

Watching the business take off "has been really exciting," said Bob Brousseau, a graphic designer and friend of Patricia Coxon. "This was something she got into before it" became a popular alternative.

Brousseau and Coxon work days together at Peptides International, a bio-tech company in eastern Jefferson County.

After-hours and on weekends, Coxon handles SunWind's marketing, the company's Web site, customer support, billing and other bookkeeping. Her 40-year-old husband oversees sales and installations.

Patricia Coxon was born in New York City and moved to Louisville in 1972 with her parents, who are from China. Her father worked as an electrical engineer for elevator companies; her mother has a degree in English literature.

They sent Coxon and a younger brother to Catholic schools. After graduating from Presentation Academy in 1988, Coxon -- whose maiden name is Tse -- earned a biology degree at Bellarmine University and later master's and doctorate degrees in microbiology and immunology from the University of Louisville.

Jeremy Coxon, a mechanical engineer, was born in England and emigrated to Louisville at age 10. Friends who knew the two enjoyed hiking, and the outdoors introduced them.

The Coxons believe that alternative energy will become increasingly popular, spurred by state-sponsored incentives, lower prices and concerns over climate change.

"I really believe that renewable energy is part of the solution to our energy crisis down the road," Patricia Coxon said. "Nothing I've ever done in my work has excited me so much."