



The Martha's Vineyard Times is a weekly publication.
August 25 - 31, 2005 Edition
Web Comments - Email Submissions

Oak Bluffs School upgrades energy efficiency

August 25, 2005

By Janet Hefler

With energy costs expected to soar this winter, Oak Bluffs school and town officials are poised to take advantage of an energy conservation program to install state-of-the-art digital technology that will control the school building's utilities. The new system is expected to save close to \$76,000 a year in fuel oil and electricity costs for the Oak Bluffs School. The savings will pay for the system in about nine years, making it cost-free to the taxpayers.

The project, which awaits contract approval by the Oak Bluffs School's lawyers, will renovate the heating system and install a new digital system produced by Siemens Building Technologies to monitor and control utilities in the entire school. The school will contract its installation and maintenance from Nelson Mechanical Design, Inc., an Island-based plumbing, heating and air-conditioning contractor.

"To fund this, we take the savings that we are guaranteed, and use that by way of payment," said Laury Binney, Oak Bluffs School principal.

Siemens provides the financing for the project and guarantees the energy savings over the life of the loan. The project costs \$561,187 to implement. Siemens will loan the school a total of \$694,080, factoring in \$132,893 interest at 4 percent annually. The school will pay roughly \$76,000, the amount guaranteed in savings by Siemens, from its annual energy budget towards paying off the loan in 9.18 years.

The contract from Siemens currently is undergoing review by attorneys for the Oak Bluffs School. The school committee met Tuesday night to get an update on the project and agreed to support it, once some contract issues are resolved. The committee voted to empower Priscilla Sylvia, the chair, to sign the contract as soon as it is approved, should it happen before next month's meeting.

Once the contract is signed, the first phase of the project, replacing the boilers, could be completed this fall before the cold weather arrives, which Mr. Binney said would give the school a head-start on energy savings this year.

Brian Nelson, a master plumber and mechanical engineer and co-owner of Nelson Mechanical Design, first presented the system proposal to school officials. "The goal is to have the school janitor sitting in his pajamas at home, using a laptop to connect to the Internet to turn on the lights in the gym," Mr. Nelson explained.

Mr. Nelson's initial interest was not strictly business. His daughter attends the Oak Bluffs School. Mr. Nelson credits his wife, Claudia, for his company's involvement.

When their daughter Sophie transferred to Oak Bluffs School last fall, Mrs. Nelson mentioned her husband's business to Laury Binney, school principal. The school had