

## Few Bright Spots for BioTown

**F**our years ago Reynolds, Indiana, received national attention when the state outlined ambitious goals for the community – declaring it BioTown, USA. Today, interest in renewable energy remains in the tiny White County town, but the fate of key initiatives is uncertain.

When Gov. Mitch Daniels announced the plan to make Reynolds a model town for energy efficiency, one of the crowning achievements was to be technology to convert biomass (manure) to energy. *BizVoice*® first reported on BioTown last year when hope had been renewed and construction on the anaerobic digester was to begin.

Now the economic downturn has stalled the public-private partnership project again, notes Connie Neining, White County Economic Development executive director. “With the cost of electricity and with the economy, it’s been a struggle to put the business plan together to make this completely viable for a private investor.”



**Purdue University’s EPICS program allows students to solve engineering-based problems within the community. One group is designing a green home for Habitat for Humanity that will be built in Reynolds.**

Still, she remains hopeful. Supporters are now reanalyzing the project and looking for additional funding sources, Neining shares. “We’re hoping some of the stimulus funds can provide a boost for this project.”

Another renewable energy project that came to Reynolds continues to struggle. VeraSun Energy Corp. planned to build an ethanol plant following the BioTown announcement. That project had been suspended since late 2007. The now bankrupt company sold the Reynolds site to Valero Renewable Fuels in April.

Despite setbacks, there remains movement toward sustainability in White County. A grant will fund a sustainable energy coordinator to cover a four-county area (White, Carroll, Tippecanoe and Clinton).

The position was formed through a partnership among Purdue University, Ivy Tech Community College and the economic development directors in the participating counties. The sustainable energy coordinator is responsible for promoting renewable energy, providing education on energy

efficiency measures and helping with workforce training efforts, Neining explains.

She also points to a new renewable energy project that broke ground in April just a few miles from Reynolds. A wind farm, which will bring 121 wind turbines to White County this year, is in the initial phase of construction.



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### Students design green home

A project in BioTown will help Habitat for Humanity build greener, cost-efficient homes throughout the state. The not-for-profit group tapped Purdue University’s EPICS (Engineering Projects in Community Service) program to design a home using green building practices.

Students have spent the last two years studying green building, collaborating with Habitat for Humanity of Lafayette. The project will wrap up during the 2009-2010 academic school year as students make final design decisions and the house is built. Students also will complete a construction manual that will be available to other Habitat affiliates, notes Harry Brown, class advisor and assistant dean of students.

David Truong, a 2009 Purdue civil engineering graduate, participated in the EPICS programs for four years – with the last two spent working on the BioTown home.

The team of students designed the home to take advantage of natural light and airflow, while ensuring the home is builder-friendly because Habitat for Humanity relies on volunteer workers, he explains.

Simple decisions can make a big difference for the home’s future owner. Dark flooring will absorb heat and lower bills in the winter and placing the living area on the south side of the home will keep light switches off longer, Truong explains.

“It makes the most sense for families with lower income to be more energy conscious because if you can save \$5 or \$10 in energy costs that’s one or two more meals you get to put on the table for your family,” he shares.

Once the design is finished, Habitat for Humanity of Lafayette will invite Habitat construction managers from across the state to participate in the build. The BioTown home will serve as a training session for other affiliates to learn about green building practices, Truong says.

To view the July/August 2008 *BizVoice*® story on BioTown, go to the archives section of [www.bizvoicemagazine.com](http://www.bizvoicemagazine.com).

#### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** Connie Neining, White County Economic Development, at (574) 583-6557 or [www.whitecountyin.org](http://www.whitecountyin.org)

**Purdue University EPICS: Engineering Projects in Community Service at <http://epics.ecn.purdue.edu>**

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