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NKU's energy savings add up

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

Industry trade journal Consulting-Specifying Engineer has cited Northern Kentucky University as an example of a publicly funded institution on the leading edge of energy conservation.

The journal - which addresses engineering issues in the mechanical, electrical and plumbing fields - dealt with Gov. Ernie Fletcher's goal of lowering Kentucky state government's energy usage by 10 percent. One tool the state is using to reach that goal is Energy Savings Performance Contracting.

With an ESPC, an energy user contracts with a company - NKU contracted with Siemens - that promises to make facilities improvements that will save a certain dollar amount on energy costs. If energy costs are greater than the guarantee, the contractor pays the difference.

ADVERTISEMENT NKU's contract started in September 2004 and lasts 12 years. It has allowed NKU to save \$591,000 in energy costs annually. This savings - more than \$7 million over the life of the contract - will pay back the principal and interest on the improvement projects within 11 years.

Larry Blake, NKU's assistant vice president for facilities management, is responsible for operating, maintaining and planning for the school's physical structures. NKU has 11 major facilities providing 1.3 million square feet of space that needs to be powered, cooled and heated.

Energy savings is a large part of Blake's job.

The energy budget for last year was \$4.7 million; of that \$2.242 million was electric and \$1.892 million was natural gas, Blake said.

The journal listed several specific improvements that NKU is making, but Blake sticks with the basics.

"A lot of what we do is simply common sense, the same things you do at home and other organizations are doing," he said. "We do night and weekend set-back on our heating and cooling systems whenever possible. We also encourage faculty, staff and students to help conserve by turning off lights and equipment not in use. We are continuously upgrading to improve efficiency."

The school's buildings also help. Being a relatively newer campus that continues to add more structures, there are fewer old buildings than on many college campuses. Also, the campus' trademark architecture helps.

"Our buildings are massive concrete structures which retain heat quite well, so they are relatively energy-friendly and well insulated," Blake said. "However, from the equipment side of things, the newer heating, cooling and lighting systems are certainly more efficient than the older systems. We are changing our systems as they reach the end of their useful life to take advantage of the new technology."

Blake stated that one improvement they will make on future buildings is better use of daytime lighting.

"We are doing our best to be good stewards," Blake said. "We are making every effort to get the most from every energy dollar."

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