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Interns power county's wind Web site

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Two young wonks played a big role this summer in getting out the word about Cascade County's wind.

Maddie Krezowski, 20, of Great Falls and Steffen Thie, 23, of Dresden, Germany, are the county's first-ever college interns.

Under the tutelage of Commissioner Peggy Beltrone, who developed the county's wind marketing program in 2002, the students of government policy devoted the entire summer to working on internal and external projects related to energy issues.

Last Wednesday, the county launched a new Web site devoted solely to wind called Cascade County Wind. The front page announces, "Putting the Wind to Work for Montanans."

The county put the interns to work developing the content of the slick-looking site and getting it up and running.

It's crammed with information for residents and developers alike, all in one place. Previously, residents had to fish around on the county's regular Web site for information such as wind-speed maps.

"The link to the maps is right on the home page," said Krezowski, demonstrating how the site works on her laptop computer in Beltrone's Courthouse Annex office.

Wind Web sites are everywhere, but none were specific to Cascade County, she said.

The new site, which "automates" the county's wind information, wouldn't have happened without the hustle and know-how of the students, Beltrone said.

"These two have done a wonderful job," she told fellow commissioners Lance Olson and Joe Briggs at a energy-related meeting Friday that was attended by the interns.

Not only did they know the high-tech ins and outs of launching a Web site, they figured out the nuts-and-bolt-type questions residents were asking about wind, then found the answers, she said.

A graduate student studied the county's juvenile justice system in 1996 but Beltrone said that was more of a research project than an internship.

Krezowski and Thie are the county's first true interns, and Beltrone said she hopes to continue the internship next year with offers to a student from Great Falls and perhaps another international

student.

It's no accident his year's inaugural crop of interns worked on energy.

Beltrone donated a stipend she received for advisory work for Montana Alberta Tie Ltd., the company building a transmission line from Great Falls to Lethbridge, to the internship project. Another third of the cost came from the developer of the Horse Shoe Bend Wind Farm near Great Falls.

The county paid the rest. The total cost was \$6,000.

The new Web site is updated immediately with news stories that Beltrone feels are relevant and with news releases and pictures of county-led wind programs, such as a recent meeting on small wind that attracted 150 residents.

"It's real time," Thie said.

Thie was attending school at Montana State University of Bozeman on an exchange program when he applied for the internship.

The political science major has another month remaining on the job. He'll be writing a 100-page research paper as part of the experience of interning in Cascade County. It might focus on how county government works, or renewable energy.

"Renewable energy is part of the government and has to be part of policy," he said.

During their first two weeks on the job, the interns said they were surprised by the variety of tasks commissioners face.

Thie noted one day might see commissioners working on getting a road fixed and the next meeting an ex-president of the United States.

Former President Bill Clinton visited Great Falls during the primary and Thie was introduced.

Krezowski, a Great Falls High School graduate, attends the University of Puget Sound, in Tacoma, Wash, where she is on the rowing team and studies international affairs and German.

But she'll be attending a university in Munich, Germany, this year, and her final day of the internship was Friday. While she is studying in Germany, she might take an internship with a wind company. She and Beltrone are looking into the possibility.

Cascade County has put up a wind turbine at its new county shop complex, which is meeting 85 percent of the facility's electricity needs. It has also installed a solar panel that pays for the electricity of a utility line lift station.

Eventually, data from both the windmill and solar panel will be added to the Web site as it's being produced, such as wind speed information and electricity production, Thie explained to commissioners at a Friday energy meeting.

The interns also have been involved in discussions involving a fuel cell that Ashlawn LLC might test at the county shop wind turbine to see how well it can store electricity.
