Early this summer I was asked to be a speaker at the American Public Power Association 2009 Customer Connections Conference in Colorado Springs. I originally declined the invitation because of the cost.

WPPI Energy awarded me one of two community scholarships for the conference so that I could participate. My attendance at the conference will also provide information and ideas for the WPPI Energy Community Relations Advisory Group on which I serve.

The Corporate Communications Director of the Grand River Dam Authority of Vinita, Oklahoma, the Energy & Business Services Manager of the Gainesville Regional Utilities in Florida, and I spoke on "Building Effective Communications Campaigns and Measuring Success" on Tuesday of this week. I was specifically asked to speak about our annual energy fairs and the community impacts of these events. Here is my presentation.

* * *

(Staff introduction of speaker). Thank you.

Good morning, everyone. I will provide a few extra facts about Evansville to give context to my presentation. Our city of 5,000 residents is located in south central Wisconsin, about 20 miles north of the Illinois border.

Established in 1839, we are historically an agricultural community. Agribusiness is still a local economic driver.

We have a tradition of alternative energy and entrepreneurial activity. Our oldest manufacturer, Baker Manufacturing Company, began business in the 1870s. From the 1890s to about 1950, Baker produced windmills. The Baker family was innovative and held patents on windmills, a hydrofoil boat, and a jumping military tank. Numerous patents were held by other citizens, often for adaptations of agricultural equipment.

Three weeks following my election as mayor, I attended my first energy fair. I had seen a write-up in our local newspaper about the fourth annual fair to be held on the Friday evening of Arbor Day. I went to the school gym expecting a typical science fair of student projects. I was amazed to see entire families pouring into the school, complete with youngsters in strollers. A commons area adjacent to the gym is used as the school cafeteria. A local civic organization was serving a light supper of sloppy joes, hot dogs, chips, cookies, and milk for a nominal cost. Students were singing songs about soybeans and giving presentations about animals on a stage at one end of the cafeteria.

The expected science projects were displayed in the gym. There were also approximately 40 exhibitors, including Wisconsin Focus on Energy, a local dairy farm, a county sustainability organization, a community farmers market, a solar energy distributor, and the Aldo Leopold Nature Center. Many of the exhibitors gave away "freebies".

There was a stage at one end of the gym where the University of Wisconsin "Mr. Science" was performing flashy science experiments. Parents and kids filled bleachers enjoying the show.

There were hands-on activities for the kids: making living necklaces and dissecting owl pellets. The atmosphere was that of a multi-ring energy circus. Environmental and energy education was actually fun.

I filed this experience in the back of my mind. Over the next several months I observed other community events and activities focused on energy conservation and environmental education.

One afternoon as I learned of yet another project, I realized that something special was underway in Evansville. I made a list of the initiatives that I knew about—it included 35 items. I added to the list a couple of times the next few months.

I write a bi-weekly mayor's column in our local paper. I wrote about Evansville's special energy and sustainability initiatives and included my list. The article attracted the attention of the only daily newspaper in our county. It resulted in a front page article entitled "Leading by example: Evansville has long been ahead of the green trend".

I now serve on the energy fair planning committee, which includes mostly school teachers. There is a "fire soul", middle school teacher Butch Beedle, who has spearheaded each fair. His passion is rain forest preservation and every other year he takes a group of students to experience the rain forests of Panama.

Each year the fair gets bigger and better. Different activities and exhibits are added. A "Ride Like the Wind" Bike Tour stops at windmills located around the city. There are bus tours to the rural greenhouse heated by solar panels or the nearby large dairy farm. There has been a live snake and reptile exhibit and recycling of electronic equipment. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources gives away free trees.

1500-2000 people attend the yearly event. New projects and activities have spawned from the fair.

* * *

SHOW POWERPOINT PHOTOS (including vintage Baker windmill at Baker Office Building, Energy Fair activities, High Mileage Vehicle Club, Pleasant Prairie Greenhouse Solar Energy Systems, Neighborhood Electric Vehicle, and Windmills on Parade).

* * *

Campaign measurements of effectiveness are indirect. Through the fair, energy education is reaching a significant number of our residents, including our youth who are engaged and accepting and can influence their parents.

Increased participation in utility-sponsored tune-up incentives, conservation efforts, and recycling activities can be determined.

A growing list of local conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable projects can be maintained and promoted. My list is now approaching sixty projects/events/activities and is growing. Some projects are large, such as establishing a ten acre school/community forest, with scores of volunteers planting and caring for over 1,400 native trees. Other items on the list are significant but "quick" events, like common council passage of a resolution to become a Wisconsin Energy Independent Community. School activities, like the High Mileage Vehicle Club, are included.

Our business community recognized the economic/community development value of a regional reputation for green initiatives. During a local economic development summit, businesses voiced their support for increasing sustainability efforts and were interested in exploring the possibility of ecotourism.

Citizen receptiveness to energy and environmental initiatives has allowed local officials to engage in lead-by-example environmental activities and renewable energy projects.

Citizen participation in a green energy purchase program initiated two years ago is over 4%, while the national average is 2%. Nearly 125 households make monthly purchases of blocks of clean energy.

I am a list person-here is my list of insights in building successful community awareness.

1. It does not have to be expensive. Annual budgeted funds for the fair were under $4000 until 2009. In 2009 the budget was increased to $5600.

   More than 125 volunteers plan and put on our fair. Most expenses were for entertainment and table rental. Free advertising is used when possible. Examples are utility bill inserts, school newsletters, flyers in grocery bags, and the use of public service radio and tv announcements. The fair is free to the public and to the exhibitors.

2. Collaborate with interested community groups. The energy fair is co-sponsored by the water and light utility, the school district, a civic organization dedicated to building a vibrant, close-knit community, and a local environmental group.

3. I recognized that the community was ahead of me on sustainability. I educated myself, partly by attendance at APPA seminars. I now am active in encouraging the community on energy efficiency and conservation. It is a spiraling, collaborative process.

The opposite can also be the case. Some communities need much extra effort to embrace energy initiatives. Involvement of the schools can provide a jump start to community-wide engagement.

4. Use a variety of community assets, such as heritage, civic organizations, businesses, art, sports, youth, and seniors, to build acceptance.

I have copies of an energy fair program, fliers of our harvest windmill festival, and remaining brochures of the Windmill Art Exhibit and Auction. My contact information is also there. Please feel free to take them.

Thank you for your attention this morning. I am proud of my community's sustainability activities and enjoy sharing ideas about community engagement. I am happy to talk further with you about energy projects and will be here until the end of the conference. Look me up.

Energy Saving Information

Kitchen and bath exhaust fans can drain you home's heated air in one hour, according to the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers.

Community Announcements

There will be a public hearing and action on the City of Evansville 2010 Budget at the November 10 Common Council meeting beginning at 6:30 p.m. in the third floor Council Chambers at City Hall. The proposed budget would reduce the City portion of the property tax by $.05/$1000.

I recently met with Eric Kuznacic of the Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board. He told me about a new program entitled "Hire a Neighbor". Here is the relevant information Eric provided.

"The Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board has partnered with Monster.com to offer job-recruitment services to any employer within a 100-mile radius of Janesville. The program, called Hire a Neighbor, was initiated after thousands of local residents were left jobless as General Motors and several of its suppliers closed their Rock County facilities.

Because purchasing a license to use Monster.com to search for qualified job candidates can be cost-prohibitive for many businesses, SWWDB and Monster combined forces to make these services more readily available. The program is fairly straightforward: when an employer is recruiting for an open position, he/she can contact Eric Kuznacic, SWWDB's Business and Employer Services Manager, who will walk the employer through the process.

Employers must sign an agreement, stating that they are recruiting for an actual job opening and that they will report any hires made because of candidates found using the Hire a Neighbor program. The employer also must furnish a job description, along with any other information that may be useful when searching the Monster.com database.

Once these materials are in hand, Mr. Kuznacic will perform a search using the employer's criteria, and forward matching resumes to the employer. If, after the initial search, the employer has not found his/her ideal candidate, another search can be conducted under the employer's direction.

For more information regarding the Hire a Neighbor program, or to begin the registration process, contact Eric Kuznacic at (608) 741-3502 or d.kuznacic@swwdb.org."

Eric also encourages all individuals searching for employment to put your resumes on Monster.com, so that your resume will be included when employer searches are made.

Community Thanks

At the recent League of Wisconsin Municipalities Conference, local officials serving their communities for more than ten years were recognized. Years of service pins were given to those individuals. Alderperson Diane Roberts was recognized for serving Evansville more than ten years. Alderperson Tom Cothard received a recognition pin for more than fifteen years of service. Evansville congratulates and thanks Diane and Tom for their dedication. They provide needed continuity and "institutional" memory to our city government.