

## Daily News (Bowling Green, KY)

### Annual tour explores BG's 'green' achievements

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Marvin Russell has been interested in "green" concepts and alternative energies since the 1970s when he was a science adviser to the U.S. Senate.

And that interest has not waned as he and about 19 others boarded a biodiesel-fueled school bus, provided by Warren County Public Schools, for the first organized bus tour that showcased just how "green" Bowling Green is. The annual Allied Alternative Energy Bowling GREEN Tour was Saturday, stopping at several locations in the area, like Lost River Cave and Valley's wetland.

"I'm delighted that Bowling Green is a leader in this," said Russell, 82. "I think as more technologies are improved, we will see more alternative forms of energy, which I think individuals and businesses will take to these energies as we gradually learn how to use them better."

The focus of the tour in the past has been on solar energy alone; however, this year it was expanded to include alternative energies in the area, said Nancy Givens of BG Green Partnership for a Sustainable Community, a main sponsor of the event. Usually a self-guided tour, this year transportation was provided for \$6, which included a ride on the bus, box lunches from local eatery Greener Groundz and a "green" goodie bag. Snacks – oatmeal bars and cider – also were provided on the ride from Jackson's Orchard. Bicycle and self-guided tour participants were able to pick up maps at ticket locations prior to the event. "I think (opening the tour up to bicyclists) was a good idea," said Susan Ammons of the Bowling Green League of Bicyclists. "It's keeping with the green concept."

The tour began at Lost River Cave with its wetlands project. From there, participants toured the Western Kentucky University farm, which has a biofuels facility.

WKU professor Kevin Smaltz explained that the student-run project will produce biodiesel fuel, which is made from waste cooking oil, to replace diesel fuel that is made from petroleum. The fuel, he said, will be used in the farm's vehicles.

The project, Smaltz said, was started by a WKU student whose father is a farmer in Glasgow and makes his own biodiesel fuel. Smaltz said once operational, they will produce 500 gallons every two to three weeks during the fall and winter and every one to two months during the summer. He said with an unlimited source of cooking oil and a state-of-the-art facility – double the \$60,000 facility cost – they could, in theory, produce 500 gallons a day.

The process, he said, produces glycerin, which will be used in another project in the Agriculture Department. Smaltz said the glycerin produced will help in the decomposition of leaves, which will be used to heat the greenhouse during the winter months.

"There are lots and lots of people who make biodiesel fuel in small batches ... we're striving to be an industrial-size mom and pop shop," he said.

After touring the farm, participants toured the soccer complex on Lovers Lane, which has the first commercial solar installation in Bowling Green and produces electricity for TVA's Green Power Switch program; and the WKU **ALIVE** Center, which has a small commercial installation – or what would be used for a residence.

During the tour of the **ALIVE** Center, Christian Ryan Downing, sustainability coordinator for WKU, gave a presentation on what's happening at the university and what's in store.

“WKU is emerging as a leader in green efforts,” she said. “Not only is WKU emerging as a leader in the region, but Bowling Green is too.”

Downing said it is inevitable that the more people there are, the more energy that’s used; however, she said that is being challenged at WKU. As the population and size of campus have increased, the energy use has decreased.

“People here are in a mind frame for conservation,” she said. “They are paying attention, shutting off lights. It goes to show individuals can make a difference.”

On WKU’s sustainability’s Web site, students can go to a link called dashboard, which tracks the electrical consumption of the university by building. Students and faculty can see and compare consumption by building, which Downing said gets them more involved.

The tour then headed to Service One Credit Union on Campbell Lane, which has been in the process of upgrading the facility to be green. There, participants toured the facility, which uses sedum – a succulent plant in the cactus family – on its roof, reused materials throughout the building, bioretention basins that clean and filter storm water, geothermal heating and cooling, LED lighting, structural wood beams from a mill in Webster County and sensor lights in bathrooms.

“Our goal is to decrease energy use by 90 percent,” said Valerie Brown, CEO of the credit union. “We are encouraging a healthy lifestyle for our employees.”

While at the credit union, participants also watched a presentation from Don Sergent, media relations director for Warren County Public Schools, on the school system’s sustainability projects, such as biodiesel buses and energy efficient buildings.

“It has been really interesting to see what’s happening in Bowling Green,” said WKU junior entrepreneurship major Jennifer Payne, 20, of Bowling Green. “Going ‘green’ is a personal interest of mine, and I’m taking an environmental policy class where we are looking at ways businesses can incorporate green practices. I knew of the credit union, but not much on Lost River Cave. This is great to see in our community.”

Ammons said she had learned a lot about solar panels and the government incentive that is now making installation of panels more affordable.

Sponsored largely through a partnership with BG Green, Allied Alternative Energy LLC, BG Area Convention and Visitors Bureau and Service One Credit Union, the tour is just one of hundreds of solar tours – including those in Kenton County, Louisville, Lexington and Frankfort – sponsored by the American Solar Energy Society nationwide.

Additional sponsors include the American Solar Energy Society, the Kentucky Solar Energy Society and Warren County Public Schools.

“I think the tour went well. I was happy to have interactive participants that were diverse – some were teachers, parents, some in the construction industry,” said Marissa Butler, public relations director for the visitors bureau and tour guide. “I think it was informative for everyone.”