

Lakeville Journal

More Power to You: Smart Power To Help Show Towns the Way By KAREN BARTOMIOLI March, 08, 2007

CORNWALL — As is often the case, Cornwall has taken the lead in thinking outside the box. In this case, the topic is energy — specifically, the high cost of it — and residents and officials in other towns are eager to listen and learn.

Cornwall was one of the first towns in the region to hear a presentation from a nonprofit group called SmartPower. The February presentation (and an article about it in The Lakeville Journal) sparked substantial interest.

"I've had officials in Falls Village and Kent, and quite a few individuals, call looking for information," First Selectman Gordon Ridgway said at March 5 meeting of his board. "There is enough interest out there that I think it's time to take a regional approach to getting the information we need."

He is arranging an informational session for sometime next month, with everyone in the area invited. SmartPower's Keri Enright will be on hand to answer questions.

Representatives from two "alternative energy" power companies will also be on hand.

And Ridgway is inviting people from the area who generate their own power, such as solar homeowners (including the Ridgway family) to come and talk about their pioneering approaches.

The increased interest in less expensive energy coincides with skyrocketing costs, and a letter in the Hartford Courant last week from Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, which said that Connecticut power customers pay more for their energy than any other customers on the continental United States.

Alternative or "clean" energy sources, such as wind and hydropower, have theoretically been available since Connecticut deregulated its electric industry several years ago. But options were few, and prices were high.

Smart Power is offering a "20 percent by 2010" program, with incentives to towns and organizations to encourage them to recruit 20 percent of residents to sign up for alternative energy.

The incentives include cash rebates and solar energy systems for sponsors (the towns themselves), as well as the sense that one is contributing to the improved health of the planet.

Ridgway reported back on a presentation made at a meeting of last week's regional Northwestern Connecticut Council of Governments. The first selectmen of nine area towns meet monthly in Warren. At last Thursday's gathering, a representative from Connecticut Light and Power explained some reasons for the energy crisis in this state.

"It's a problem with the transmission system," Ridgway summed up the presentation. "They can't get the power where they need it easily."

The solution, he said, is more on-site generation, as well as incentives for people generating their own power to sell back to the grid.