

**NW CERT Meeting Summary**  
**Growing Community & Saving Energy in Gonvick & Clearbrook:**  
**Retrofitting Existing Buildings for Energy Efficiency**  
**Clear Waters Life Center, Gonvick, MN**  
Friday, August 20th, 2010

By Rin Porter and Joel Haskard

A nice crowd of about 25 people gathered for the Northwest CERT meeting at 1 PM on August 20 at 226 Elm Street in Gonvick, Minnesota, in Clearwater County.  
<http://www.clearwaterslife.org/>

Everyone met at the Clear Waters Life Center, formerly the Gonvick Public School, and were given a tour of the facility by Clear Waters Life Center co-directors Darien Northup and Becky Dorman and Architect Tom Jones. The facility is being remodeled from its former use as a school into a type of community center operated by Clear Waters Life Center, a nonprofit organization based in Clearbrook.

The Clear Waters Life Center took over the Clearbrook High School in 2002 and turned it into a multi-purpose building with five owners. There, in its section of the building, the Clear Waters Life Center operates a variety of programs including counseling, after-school activities for kids, a drug rehabilitation program, and more. There is a library, conference room, and other facilities.

Tom Jones mentioned that it costs money to tear a building down and haul away the rubble, so the Gonvick school board paid Clearwater Life Center, a faith-based nonprofit, to refurbish the building similar to what they had accomplished in Clearbrook. The Clear Waters Life Center staff used their previous experience in renovating and reusing the Clearbrook school building to design a program for the Gonvick School, which they took over in 2004 after the building had been vacant for 5 years. (The students from both communities had moved to a new school north of Clearbrook in 1992.)

The 27,325 sq ft building had no heating plant, and had been damaged by vandalism and neglect. The concrete block building has portions dating from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In 2009, the Clear Waters Life Center requested an energy assessment from the MPCA's RETAP (Retired Engineers Technical Assistance Program) to get ideas about what should be done first to prepare the building for occupancy.

Central CERT Steering Committee member Rin Porter RETAP consultant conducted the energy assessment and prepared the RETAP report. Becky Dorman stated how helpful the RETAP report had been. "I really appreciated the report. I could understand it. It told us the real things we could improve and the costs and savings of those improvements. It was very useful."

Using the RETAP report, Clear Waters Life Center applied for and received several grants to help remodel and refurbish the building, including a \$4,000 grant from Northwest CERT for an engineering study to determine Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) needs, and a \$97,000 grant from the Minnesota Office of Energy Security Energy Efficiency Community Block Grant to rehabilitate the gym by insulating the roof and walls. A gift from the Valspar Corporation through the Northwest Minnesota Foundation helped with painting. All debris was removed from the interior, and moldy areas cleaned with bleach before the electrical systems could be installed. Insulation of the gym is under way, along with partial roof replacement. All interior glass in the building has been replaced. More grant applications are planned.

While all this was going on, the Clear Waters Life Center staff recruited two small businesses to locate themselves in the building, offered adult education classes, installed a greenhouse, held an art festival including drama performances, and engaged an artist to paint a mural on the wall of the former band room. Some of the activities were funded by the Region 2 Arts Council. Becky and Darien mentioned the Minnesota Legacy funds as a good resource for art funding <http://www.arts.state.mn.us/grants/machf.htm>. Since students in the area are now only going to school for 4-days a week, they plan to offer an art class every Monday. They also noted that Valspar had helped with paint donations [http://www.valsparglobal.com/corp/about/valspar\\_foundation.jsp](http://www.valsparglobal.com/corp/about/valspar_foundation.jsp).

The Gonvick facility is currently open Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. As the tour progressed, the group saw a stage area, a fitness center, a room for quilting and scrapbooking, and a show room for refurbished furniture (they do refinishing and other vocational work on-site). They have an active gardening center, and are working on landscaping and metal sculptures. There will be transitional apartments for young women, and potentially a commercial kitchen and small restaurant for the community. July 10th was Gonvick's Centennial and local citizens were happy to see the renovations thus far.

Otter Tail Power helped the project by resizing the electric service and offering rebates that will be received after the HVAC is installed and other energy upgrades are made.

Many other activities and projects are in development. Clear Waters Life Center at Gonvick is a superb example of the creative reuse of a building, fueled by community support and partnerships with a variety of organizations.

After the tour, participants carpoled to Clearbrook, just four miles away, to hear additional presentations and see the Clear Waters Life Center's original facility. The Clearbrook facility was renovated by Clearwater Life Center beginning in 2004. It is a little less than 50,000 square feet; the Gonvick school is just under 30,000 square feet.

Darien Northup and Becky Dorman spoke, followed by a presentation by Central CERT steering committee member and RETAP consultant Rin Porter, who conducted the energy assessment for the Gonvick School in the fall of 2009. Architect Tom Jones explained the process of rehabilitating the building and his part in it.

Darien Northup and Becky Dorman mentioned that Clearwater Life Center is now one of five owners in the building. Many groups of volunteers helped with the building and a church in Minneapolis donated money for all the windows. The utility bill is divided between the five owners. They now also have new insulation, and they heat the building with large centrally ducted off-peak heating Steffes heating systems [www.steffes.com](http://www.steffes.com).

Rin Porter talked about Minnesota Retired Engineer Technical Assistance Program (RETAP) <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/topics/preventing-waste-and-pollution/assistance-and-resources/minnesota-retap.html?menuid=&missing=0&redirect=1>. She audited the Gonvick building and suggested weather stripping, replacing the gym roof, adding 4 inches of rigid foam insulation, re-caulking the wood windows, and noted that they had a large field if they ever wanted to consider geothermal, and have good south facing roofs if they wanted to consider solar.

Tom Jones said the county originally was reluctant because if one of the five owners backed out of the project it would be a tax forfeit. He suggested groups wanting to do similar projects need to find those community members who are your allies and can help get a project done, and that the very first funding for the Clearbrook project was a community member that stepped forward and donated a can of loose change (\$42).

Next, Brian Martin, Mechanical Engineer & Owner of Martin Mechanical Design in Fargo (701-293-7957; [bmartin@martinmech.com](mailto:bmartin@martinmech.com)), talked about the mechanical engineering report he prepared for the Gonvick facility, funded by the Northwest CERT grant. Brian stressed the importance of factoring in operating costs regardless of what

energy system a building uses. He used the East Grand Forks City Hall as an example: although a fairly new building, he did some fairly basic recommissioning of the building and was able to save the city \$33,000 in one year.

Brian has given Clearwater Life Center several choices on how to provide energy and heat to the building. The roof repair is a major factor they are addressing now; Brian said folks need to remember that 80-90% of heat can be lost through the roof and only 10-20% through the walls.

The last speaker was Ken Johnson, Energy Management representative, of Otter Tail Power utility (800-257-4044; [kjohnson@otpc.com](mailto:kjohnson@otpc.com)). Ken Johnson talked about the Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) incentives that commercial customers in the Otter Tail's service territory have. To learn more, visit <http://www.otpc.com/SaveEnergyMoney/BusinessConservationPrograms.asp>. He mentioned folks can ask for his assistance with a plan review of buildings over 15,000 square feet and that this is a free service.

When the speakers had finished their presentations, Joel Haskard of Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) provided brief updates on current CERTs Opportunities for Action in Your Community. Check it out!

- GreenStep Cities: <http://www.mngreenstep.org>
- CERTified Campaigns
  - Come Home to Comfort and Energy Savings: <http://thermostat.mncerts.org>
  - Hot Rebates for Solar Thermal: <http://solarthermal.mncerts.org>
  - Green Up Your Fleet: <http://greenfleet.mncerts.org>