



**WERC Helps Make A Thirty Year Old Dream a Reality
For Melody Lane Farms Owner Alvin Huff by Alicia Duncan**

In a pastoral field just outside the small Minnesota community of Glencoe flies a windy testament to one man's commitment to living a self-sufficient life. A 120-foot tower holds a Jacobs 20 kilowatt wind turbine which stands like a sentinel in Alvin Huff's soybean field, making an unobtrusive but exhilarating whoosh as rotor blades 31 feet in diameter respond to the abundant force of the prairie wind. The rotor spins the main shaft of the turbine, driving the electrical generator and producing more than enough electricity to power Alvin and Donna Huff's Melody Lane flower farm.

Sometime during the 1970s, Alvin picked up a copy of *Mother Earth News* and found out that he could make a functioning wind turbine from used car parts. Intrigued, he held on to the idea for over thirty years, meanwhile cultivating a greater interest in renewable energy and commitment to the environment. In January of 2006, Alvin decided to invest in a Minnesota based Jacobs's factory-made version of his wind turbine dream. Working with Winkelman's Environmentally Responsible Construction (WERC), Alvin applied for and received a USDA Rural Development Grant to offset 25 percent of the cost. WERC provided design, site planning services and permitting assistance and from October to December of 2006 WERC staff constructed and installed the farm-sized turbine.

At almost 80 years of age, Alvin Huff has a youthful, good-natured presence. Over the years, he has embraced his penchant for self-motivated learning, and it shows in his life's success and the ease with which he passes his knowledge on to others. After raising cattle and hogs for many years, Alvin worked at the local post office for three decades, eventually becoming Postmaster. He was appointed County Commissioner and served on a total of 44 committees during his term. The local community theater was established by Alvin and his wife, Donna, with Donna creating costumes and Alvin building sets. Together, they performed the lead roles in *On Golden Pond* three times. Alvin and Donna have lived in the same comfortable, sun-filled home since 1950. This spring, ambitious Alvin plans to replace a third-story roof. Having always had a passion for cut flowers, he also runs a cut flower business. Melody Lane Farms is a one-man operation: Alvin raises field-grown flowers and sells them at farmers markets in Minneapolis and McLeod County.

Alvin is both practical and enthusiastic about the potential for small wind to strengthen the local economy, and he is doing all he can to promote small wind in McLeod County. The ribbon-cutting ceremony at Alvin's wind turbine doubled as a community outreach event and was even attended by a local middle school student doing a class project on renewable energy. Alvin is involved in PRACT McLeod, a community group committed to promoting the advancement of alternative energy sources. He is also active in promoting curriculum at two local college campuses that will prepare students for local jobs created by renewable energy. Among the potential academic programs are the electronic engineering, electrician training on Renewable Energy, constructing wind turbine components, tower maintenance, and – equally important – the art of safely climbing a 120-foot tower to perform routine maintenance. Alvin is serious about getting students involved in wind energy – he plans to set up a system to share his power generation data with potential installers, electricians, high schools, universities, and in his words "anyone who wants it". Partnerships between local schools and small wind projects have great potential and, as Alvin sees it, are a perfect way to get people of all ages excited and educated about wind power.

Alvin Huff is a model of self-sufficiency and imagination. He installed a wind turbine on his farm because he believes wind energy makes good sense for his pocketbook, the environment, and the local community. And in the true spirit of a hardworking Minnesotan, he believes that nothing of value should be wasted – especially not the wind.



Pier foundation view Rebar will be welded in steel form for added strength.



Wind turbine tower foundation ready for pouring concrete.



WERC team arrives with wind turbine assembly.



Assembly -All that is needed to produce your own power.



Tower starting to take shape.