

Mt. St. Mary's Abbey Wind Turbine

Sr. Mariann Garrity

Incidentally, this is the wind turbine you can see if you're on 495. We are just a few miles off exit 16. It is a 100kW wind turbine made by Northern Power from Barre, Vermont. You can also see it from many local roads in the area. It towers about 130 feet in the area so it has become a way for people to find the abbey, a place off the beaten track.

The abbey has been there since 1949. It is a place where 43 women live and work. We support ourselves by the work of our hands, balancing work and prayer. When the nuns first came to Wrentham, the area was all cow pastures owned by the Garelick Brothers. Actually, our home straddles the towns of Wrentham and Franklin. The wind turbine is really in Franklin. The abbey has only a few neighbors, all of whom are in Wrentham. These realities come into play a little later in the story. . .

The nuns were often out in the fields with the cows, and so knew that our land—some of the highest in the area—was windy. They even investigated wind power, but the cost was prohibitive—so they never did anything about it. In late 2006, Mother Agnes Day went to an event at Portsmouth Abbey and, on her return, asked me to investigate the possibility of putting up a wind turbine. I learned that things had changed and that the state's Clean Energy Center (then the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative) was opening up another round of funding which would, essentially, match our contribution for erecting a wind turbine. Interestingly, those who put me on to this were engineers from National Grid.

In the initial round with MTC, we were paired with Sustainable Energy Development, a firm in upstate New York who did a feasibility study and eventually saw the entire project through to completion. Having those well-versed in what to do was invaluable. For example, our consultants picked a site which would be at one of the highest spots, but one which was away from trees—and also one which was 500 yards away from where anyone slept (whether in Wrentham or Franklin)—just to avoid problems. When it came time for local permitting, I went to our Wrentham neighbors and explained what we were doing. They were unanimously supportive. After we submitted the paperwork, the town of Franklin told us that they had nothing in place for wind turbines, and so we were free to erect one—and would the consultants and I come and talk with them about our ideas.

Our wind turbine was installed in December 2009. We have had it, then, for two years. It pays a good chunk of the abbey's electricity bill. Just last March, we completed construction on a new building which houses our candy operation: Trappistine Quality Candy (we had to give up the cows in the late 90s). That building uses much more electricity than we had anticipated back in 2007 when we had to "size" the turbine, so the turbine does not pay for the increased electricity at the candy house. However, we are happy with it:

- Our monastic values of simplicity and concern for creation
- The practical effect of supplying our electrical needs.