

A JMU go-green energy team

Sustainable Energy Developments is a leader in wind power

By HALI CHIET ('07)

In April 2002, five JMU alumni came together to form Sustainable Energy Developments Inc. – a company that is now the leader in decentralized wind energy projects in the northeastern United States. The original founders of this go-green energy team, **Kevin Schulte ('00), Loren Pruskowski ('00), George McConochie ('00), Ernest Pritchard III ('00)** and **Joseph Swaha**, all met at JMU. Now, the company boasts three more alumni – **David Strong ('03), John Trout ('05)** and **Scott Abbett ('00)**.

"We're trying to bring renewable energy services and products to people so that they can be more self-sufficient," says Pruskowski.

Schulte adds, "One of our goals is to increase the awareness of the benefits of wind power across the Northeastern United States."

Whereas most companies set up large wind turbines in one location, SED installs turbines in a more distributed fashion. "Most of the electricity people use is actually made hundreds of miles away," says Strong, who joined SED in 2002 after serving as an intern. "We encourage people to make energy right where they use it. To break it down simply, we create distributed rather than centralized energy generation."

After graduation, Schulte worked on building wind farms for a company in Texas. Pruskowski was working on wind resource assessment in Albany, and McConochie, Pritchard and Swaha were learning about wind project construction throughout the nation. In September 2001, Pruskowski got the urge to reconnect with the others after 9/11. "I was working in the field on top of a mountain during 9/11, and I was very isolated," he says. "I phoned Schulte and told him it was time we created our own company. I felt it was a great time to start; the world was changing, and a company like ours could support positive change."

In March 2002, Schulte, Pruskowski and McConochie moved into a small apartment in Schenectady, N.Y., to create a formal business plan. Pritchard joined soon after and helped finance the company. On April 2, 2002, the plan was submitted to the New York State Attorney General's Office, and SED Inc. became official.

"We're all excited by the freedom of a small business and by working by our own philosophy," says Trout, who became a full-time employee in August 2006 after interning in 2005.

At first, the company founders focused on wind resource assessment work, evaluating potential wind farm sites on the East Coast. They were successful thanks to Pruskowski's and

Schulte's educational foundations in environmental engineering and energy systems design from the JMU College of Integrated Science and Technology. "They have a mantra in ISAT about being problem solvers," says Schulte. "We help develop wind power projects that allow people to be more self-sufficient and that contribute to a greener environment."

To remain financially sound from the start, SED received its main source of income by installing meteorological towers. Pritchard, McConochie and Swaha had all previously worked in the meteorological tower construction business. As the company developed, the founders realized there was a niche in the

wind market that was not being attended to – schools, farms, municipalities, factories and small towns. "We want to help benefit communities and show them that wind power can provide both environmental and economic benefits," says Abbett, who joined SED in 2005.

In July 2007, with the help of a grant, SED installed a 1.5-megawatt GE wind turbine atop the Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort, which helped the company gain a strong foothold in the wind power industry. "It's exciting to be a part of a company that's on the forefront of change," says McConochie. "We've seen so much change in the acceptance and conscience of wind power energy."

At the wind turbine outside the SED company headquarters are (l-r): George McConochie ('00), Ernie Pritchard ('00), Loren Pruskowski ('00), Dave Strong ('03), Kevin Schulte ('00), John Trout ('05) and Scott Abbett ('00).

In 2008 SED moved to a new office in Ontario, N.Y., and completed a 600-kilowatt wind turbine at Holy Name Junior/Senior High School in Worcester, Mass. – the first turbine of that size in Worcester. The team also installed the first large wind turbine at Hyannis Country Garden in Cape Cod and incorporated wind power into the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. SED is the first company to have installed four commercial scale wind turbines in Massachusetts. The projects also were each a first – the first wind turbine at a ski resort in the United States, the first for a high school in Massachusetts, the first commercial scale wind turbine on Cape Cod and the first at a public school in Massachusetts.

"We really need to see the use of more renewable energy sources in the U.S.," says Pritchard. "I hope that our experience and our abilities can help promote the use of wind energy throughout our great nation." ■

