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### **Renewable Energy – Why Should You Care?**

**By Sherry Ristau, Southwest Minnesota Foundation President, and Kevin Johnson,  
Southwest Minnesota Foundation Program Officer**

Until recently, many people didn't even know what the words "renewable energy" meant. If they heard the topic mentioned, they turned a deaf ear, thinking it didn't make much of a difference in their everyday life. All of that changed when Hurricane Katrina, one of our nation's worst national disasters, occurred and was quickly followed by Hurricane Rita. Each of us felt a small piece of these hurricanes' impact when we went to fill our tanks with gas, and from all predictions, we'll be feeling another pinch in our personal finances when we go to pay our heating bills this winter.

As a result of these events, the words "renewable energy" now spark nearly everyone's attention. Renewable energy encompasses the areas of wind, biomass, and biofuels – all of which give us hope for a clean, economical, reliable, and "home grown" source for our nation's future energy consumption needs. The subject peaked the attention of the Southwest Minnesota Foundation nearly two years ago when the Foundation saw a need to promote existing economic assets in the region to foster greater

prosperity and address the challenges posed by demographic and economic changes.

With input from regional business leaders, the Foundation identified renewable energy as one of the region's greatest assets, holding vast potential for economic growth.

With the changes in the world and our nation, nearly everyone can agree that we need to lessen our dependence on foreign markets for energy resources and we have a need to clean up our environment. A big part of the solution exists right here in southwest Minnesota! We have all the elements required to create a thriving renewable energy commerce center to invest, build, sell and distribute renewable energy products. The 18-county area is rich with natural resources, value-added agricultural industries, intellectual and local capital, education and non-profit support, and political support – all of the requirements to make southwest Minnesota the marketplace for renewable energy. That's why the Southwest Minnesota Foundation is launching a marketing strategy to advance renewable energy in the 18 counties of southwest Minnesota and beyond by branding the area as the Renewable Energy Marketplace™.

Our goals include educating and communicating about the benefits of renewable energy and the potential for economic growth by promoting this local asset, and to help organizations in the 18-county area “speak with one voice” to promote the region as *the place* for renewable energy commerce. This column is one part of our communications efforts. You will see a monthly Renewable Energy Marketplace™ column in this newspaper for the next 12 months written by a variety of guest writers who have expertise in the field of renewable energy and knowledge about the potential for expanding the industry in southwest Minnesota. We hope you will take the time to read the columns and learn what's happening right here in your backyard. We also hope you

will consider what you can do to help promote this important economic asset for the betterment of area communities and citizens.

You can learn more about the Southwest Minnesota Foundation's work to promote the Renewable Energy Marketplace™ by logging on to our Web site at [www.renewableenergymarketplace.org](http://www.renewableenergymarketplace.org). Check back often because the site is a work in progress. Learn more about the exhibit the Foundation sponsored at the 2005 Minnesota State Fair and the organizations that participated, the Community Wind Financing Workshop, the grants the Foundation has available to promote the Renewable Energy Marketplace™, the renewable energy projects in southwest Minnesota, links to related Web sites, and much more. Also feel free to contact Kevin Johnson, Southwest Minnesota Foundation Program Officer, with your questions and ideas at 1-800-594-9480 or [kevinj@swmnfoundation.org](mailto:kevinj@swmnfoundation.org). All of us have a role to play in advancing renewable energy as a critical asset in the region. We hope you'll consider how you can get involved.

*This monthly column is brought to you by the Southwest Minnesota Foundation as part of its initiative to advance renewable energy as an economic asset in southwest Minnesota by branding and promoting the region as The Renewable Energy Marketplace™. For more information on the Renewable Energy Marketplace™, log onto [www.renewableenergymarketplace.org](http://www.renewableenergymarketplace.org) and for more information on the Southwest Minnesota Foundation, log onto [www.swmnfoundation.org](http://www.swmnfoundation.org).*

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