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Work on Little Chute windmill, visitor center to begin this fall

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LITTLE CHUTE — Fifth-grade teacher Mary Ann Anderson can't help but get excited when she thinks about the educational opportunities the Little Chute windmill will offer when it opens next June.

Her sister Trish Van Lith also is counting down the days until the 100-foot-tall authentic functioning Dutch windmill in the area of Main and Monroe streets is unveiled to the public.

As the owner of Pop In Again bar, 1420 E. Main St., in Little Chute, Van Lith is certain the structure will be a tourist attraction, making it a boon to downtown businesses.

"I don't think that Little Chute understands the magnitude that this windmill is going to generate for Little Chute," she said. "I'm very excited. That's going to help me out."

The two women were among 45 people to attend a presentation last Wednesday at Little Chute High School on the windmill's construction progress.

Robin Dekker, executive director of Little Chute Windmill Inc., recently returned from a trip to the Netherlands, where she visited Verbij Windmill Design & Construction, the company hired to design and build the village's structure.

She shared pictures of the Little Chute windmill's construction, along with photos and brief videos of various historic windmills throughout the Netherlands.

Dekker also provided some measurements of the various parts that will make up the Little Chute windmill to give the public a better understanding of the magnitude of the structure.

The base of the windmill will be 30 feet in diameter. The sail stock, which are the blades or sails, will be 80 feet in length. The two millstones, which will grind grain into flour, will weigh 4,400 pounds combined. The sail stock axle, which will hold the sails, will measure 16 feet in length and weigh 7,700 pounds.

"If you think about these measurements, you can get an idea of the windmill as a huge machine," Dekker said. "We tend to think of a windmill as something beautiful, something scenic, but really, what they are is a machine and a factory."

Little Chute's windmill, which will feature a blue color scheme to reflect the village's color, will serve as a gristmill, grinding grain into flour. Each part on the windmill will be identified so visitors will understand the function that each component serves.

Visitors to the windmill will enter through the Van Asten Visitor Center, which is slated to begin construction in September. A general contractor will be selected this summer for the facility, which will be built to resemble a Dutch warehouse. The center's exterior will feature brick, gables, shutter windows and doors, while the interior will use brick and timbers to create a warehouse feel.

The visitor center will house a museum, media room, gift shop, workspace for the Little Chute Historical Society and offices.

The museum will contain historical displays interpreting the legacy of Dutch settlement in Little Chute and Northeast Wisconsin, while the media room will be used to screen historical videos and footage of the windmill's construction.

"You go through the museum, you watch the videos in the video room and from there you go to the base of the windmill," Dekker said, noting that the structure will be handicap-accessible. "A tour guide will take visitors through different levels of



Robin Dekker, executive director of Little Chute Windmill Inc., stands in front of the sail stock axle for the Little Chute Windmill during a recent visit to Verbij Windmill Design & Construction in the Netherlands. The 100-foot-tall structure will open to the public in June 2010. Photo courtesy of Robin Dekker

the windmill."

Dekker said about 65 volunteers will be needed to operate the windmill, which will be closed each December, January and February because of Wisconsin's harsh winters.

"I encourage you to consider becoming a volunteer miller, consider becoming a tour guide, working in the gift shop, working at special events — anything you feel you can do to help out or you think would be fun," she said.

Donations also are needed for the project. Dekker said \$2.1 million has been raised for the windmill, with 80 percent of those funds coming from Little Chute businesses and residents. But the fundraising goal is \$2.8 million.

Robert de Jong received a round of applause at the end of the presentation when he handed over a \$1,000 check for the project on behalf of the Appleton West Rotary Club.

Dekker encouraged residents who attended the meeting to spread the word about the Little Chute windmill to friends and family.

"We anticipate 20,000 visitors coming to the windmill and the visitor center annually. If you use Wisconsin Department of Tourism statistics, our windmill has the potential of bringing \$1.7 million in travel spending into the local economy annually. The hope is that existing businesses will thrive and it will create a climate for entrepreneurship and business development as well."

Additional Facts

Windmill timeline at a glance

December 2008: Little Chute Windmill ordered.

August-September 2009: Groundbreaking for the Van Asten Visitor Center; first pieces of the windmill arrive from Holland.

February 2010: Remaining pieces of windmill arrive from the Netherlands.

March-May 2010: Windmill assembly and construction takes place in Little Chute by the Verbij Windmill Design and Construction team.

June 2010: Little Chute Windmill and the Van Asten Visitor Center opens to the public.