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## Funding gives boost to Essex County businesses

### **Essex County employers receive energy-efficiency funding**

DAN HEATH Press-Republican

CHESTERFIELD — Three businesses in Essex County have received USDA grants and guaranteed loans for energy-efficiency projects.

U.S. Rep. Bill Owens joined U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Energy Coordinator Scott Collins Monday at Essex Box and Pallet in the Town of Chesterfield to announce the funding.

#### ESSEX BOX AND PALLET

Essex Box and Pallet will get a \$225,000 grant through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development's Rural Energy for America Program. The USDA also guaranteed a loan from Champlain National Bank for \$450,000. And the Essex County Industrial Development Agency provided Essex Box and Pallet with a \$225,000 loan.

Owners Michael and Colleen Lemza will use the \$900,000 to expand their pallet-manufacturing business to include wood-pellet production.

The pellets would be made from sawdust and wood residue by-products from the pallet-making process.

"It's been a long process getting to this point," Mr. Lemza said.

Collins said the Rural Energy for America Program is funded through the 2008 federal Farm Bill. It allows eligible farms and rural small businesses to get funds to improve energy efficiency.

"This project fits that to a T."

Collins said he's excited about the project. Local production of wood pellets could help lower heating costs for area residents, he said.

Essex Box and Pallet has 12 employees now, and Mr. Lemza said they are likely to add two



Essex Box and Pallet owner Michael Lemza (right) gives Congressman Bill Owens a tour of his business. The Rural Development's Rural Energy for America Program gave funds to manufacture wood pellets at Essex Box and Pallet, located in Keeseville. Two other Essex County ventures received funding, too.

when the pellet manufacturing starts. The company could eventually add up to eight workers if demand requires.

"Our goal is to produce pellets by the end of May or early June," Mr. Lemza said.

Owens said this is a great example of collaboration between the public and private sectors. It is also a way to take advantage of the many opportunities for bio-mass energy production available in the Adirondacks, he said.

"This is proof these kind of projects are going forward and creating jobs."

Essex County IDA Co-Executive Director Carol Calabrese said the agency provided funding through the Essex County Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund.

"We've been working with Michael and Colleen for the past 2½ years on this project," she said.

The use of a waste by-product for energy is a fabulous example of green energy, Calabrese said.

"This is the truest form of green I can think of."

Chesterfield Town Supervisor Gerald Morrow said most people don't realize the obstacles the Lemzas faced as they worked to expand their business. It was done despite the difficult economic climate in Essex County, New York state and the Adirondack Park, he said.

"Essex County and the Town of Chesterfield owes them a debt of gratitude."

#### WILLSBORO SCHOOL

Collins also announced a \$600,000 loan guarantee to Stonebrook Properties.

Stonebrook owner Eli Schwartzberg plans to convert the former Willsboro School building into Champlain Valley Senior Community, a 62-room assisted-living facility.

The loan guarantee will be used to install a wood-pellet boiler to heat the facility.

Schwartzberg said the availability of high-quality wood pellets produced 20 minutes away will save him a lot in transportation charges.

"I'm going to be a local customer for this (Essex Box and Pallet) project."

He said renovations should start within three months and be done by late 2011 or early 2012.

The project also previously received a \$5.3 million loan guarantee through the USDA Business and Industry Loan program.

It is an ideal location, Schwartzberg said, because it's within easy walking distance to the library, restaurants and churches. It is also a short ride to catch the Essex ferry to Burlington.

#### ESSEX FARM

The third announcement was for a \$40,780 USDA grant to Essex Farm.

It will be used to install a 25-kilowatt solar photovoltaic system at the farm.

"All told, we have had a pretty significant impact in Essex County through this program this year," Collins said.

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