

**This winter's reached an all-time low.**

THE BUFFALO NEWS

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COMMENTARY

## Windmills could blow jobs our way

Donn Esmonde

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History was made on a recent gloomy morning. A giant crane hoisted what looked like the propeller of Paul Bunyan's airplane 310 feet into the Lackawanna fog. Workmen then fastened the 147,000-pound blades to the top of a mammoth steel pole. Wind turbine No. 3 — of a set of eight — of the "Steel Winds" project was done.

Drive along the Route 5 waterfront and gaze in disbelief. Sprouting from the slag of the old Bethlehem Steel site are the massive propellers-on-poles of what could grow into America's largest urban wind farm. The energy of the future meets the industrial waste of the past. The legacy of yesterday is the footprint for tomorrow.

"We're doing renewable

energy on a brownfield site," said Erie County Executive Joel Giambra, an early project backer. "It's a message that we're no longer the backwards, upside-down smokestack community that people perceive us to be."

Fate has not forsaken us. It gave us a stiff wind blowing off Lake Erie. It left us a vast lakeside stretch of befouled land unsuitable for human habitation — but perfect for the mammoth wind turbines that no one wants to live near.

We will soon spin the Lake Erie wind into energy gold. It is not a massive amount. The eight windmills — expandable to 32 — will generate power for 6,000 homes. But the giant turbines mean more than clean energy; they open the door to manufacturing jobs for a 21st century industry. The idea is not just for us to plant these things, but to make them.

"The mission is to capture not just kilowatts, but jobs," said wind energy advocate Bob Knoer.

The assets that made Buffalo great can help us again. Mammoth wind turbines are best shipped by barge. Waterways connect us to markets in the United States, Canada and Europe. We have a supply of workers, stretches of industrial land, and we sit on a highway/railroad hub, with a cargo airport in Niagara Falls. America is a booming market for wind power, and manufacturers — many of them in Europe — are looking for U.S. sites.

"It's a return to our roots," said Mark Mitskovski. "Buffalo grew because of its location on the lakes, cheap power [from Niagara Falls] and its transportation hub."



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Mitskovski was Giambra's point guy on wind power before joining downstate's BQ Energy, co-developers of the Steel Winds project.

Mitskovski said that Clipper Wind Power, which made the Steel Winds turbines in Iowa, is among the companies looking for new manufacturing sites. About 1,000 jobs will bloom in Pennsylvania, which last year landed an assembly plant for European windmill giant Gamesa Energy.

Negotiating the heavy-subsidy Pennsylvania deal was Dan Gundersen, who is now our upstate economic czar. Having Gundersen — who did not return numerous calls to comment — on our side helps in our fight to land a plant.

"The assets we have," added Mitskovski, "put us above the pack. But we need a local base of support and serious lifting by the state."

Politicians from Giambra to Rep. Brian Higgins are pushing for wind power. But only a political/business bull rush will win us the jobs we badly need. Tom Kucharski of the BNE, our business marketing group, leads the hunt.

"These [wind] companies are looking to expand, and we are the perfect spot," said Kucharski, who said he is "having conversations" with Clipper, Gamesa and other windmill makers.

A sweet wind blows on industrial wasteland in Lackawanna. We need to get smart and work fast, to make it blow jobs our way.

[desmonde@buffnews.com](mailto:desmonde@buffnews.com)

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