

'Green' bicyclists start tour from Howard

By Seth Tupper

The Mitchell Daily Republic

September 14, 2004

HOWARD — A group of "green" bicyclists started a six-day, 500-mile ride Monday morning from the doorstep of a South Dakota company that is helping to harness the renewable power of the wind.

About 15 members of the Green Bike Tour 2004 set out from the Energy Maintenance Service plant in Howard. The kickoff for the bicycle tour coincided with an open house in honor of the newly expanded facilities at EMS, where workers rebuild wind-turbine components and systems.

The participants in the Green Bike Tour, which will end Saturday in Wisconsin, are on a public-relations mission. Some of the riders are using solar-powered electric-assist bicycles.

"We hope to change policy in Midwest states to allow renewable energy to grow faster," said David Osterberg, a University of Iowa professor and organizer of the tour. "Global climate change is real. We can confront this environmental problem and help our economy in the Midwest."

Howard was an appropriate choice for the tour's starting point. The city erected South Dakota's first municipally owned and operated wind turbine in 2001, and the nearby towns of Canova and Carthage erected wind turbines in 2002 and 2003. The energy from the turbines decreases the amount of power that the cities must buy from outside sources.

EMS, which is headquartered in Gary, erected the first of Howard's two turbines in 2001 and opened a plant in the city that same year. EMS has a growing workforce of five in Howard, plus five to 10 more in Gary and about 35 around the country.

EMS was founded by Howard native Joe Kolbach. The company provides numerous services to the wind industry, including turbine remanufacturing, sales, installation and maintenance, and design-build services for new wind projects.

The company expanded its Howard operations this year by acquiring a former fish-hatchery building near its remanufacturing plant. Inside the newly acquired structure, workers will rebuild 23,000-pound turbine gear boxes.

Steve Scott, another Howard native and one of four financial partners in EMS, said the market for rebuilt turbine components is expanding as wind projects get older. Scott said he views rebuilt components as a driver of the company's growth.

The green bikers would like to see EMS succeed, because a growing wind industry means less reliance on non-renewable energy sources like fossil fuels. Scott said South Dakota, which possesses some of the nation's best wind resources, should build more wind projects.

"In general, South Dakota was very, very, very slow in responding to the potential market," Scott said. "South Dakota was asleep at the switch for about 15 years."

Scott said Gov. Mike Rounds and legislators have taken positive steps, such as altering the taxation of turbine equipment

in order to encourage wind-energy projects. The change in the law helped spur construction of a



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Jim Cooper, of Ames, Iowa, prepares to begin the first leg of the six-day Green Bike Tour 2004 Monday at the Energy Maintenance Service plant in Howard. In the background is one of the city's

\$40 million wind farm 10 miles south of Highmore last year.

The state's potential for further development was obvious to people at Monday's event in Howard, where 20 mph winds pushed the blades of the city's two turbines. The green bikers had to contend with the wind as they began their journey, which will include stops at many renewable energy projects.

"We are going to see lots of exciting examples of how renewable energy technology can keep money working in our own communities, and provide a more secure energy future," Osterberg said.

The progress of the Green Bike Tour 2004 is being tracked with stories and photos on the Internet at www.GreenBike.org