

# ENERGY FOUNDATION STICKS TO ITS MISSION

Though Phelps is not ready to proclaim victory from deck of aircraft carrier ... yet.

By Kirkner

Peter Graves's character in Mission Impossible was named Mr. Phelps. His job: to turn the impossible into mission accomplished.

Locally, the High Sierra Energy Foundation (HSEF) has its own Mr. Phelps, and his job is a very similar one. To convince people that the impossible is indeed attainable. And it's attainable by doing the little things while envisioning the big picture.

The High Sierra Energy Initiative (HSEI), a partnership between Southern California Edison (SCE) and the Town of Mammoth Lakes, was established in 2006. HSEF manages the partnership.

In his role as HSEF's Executive Director, Phelps has outlined the first mission of the Initiative.

"Renewables, energy efficiency and energy education," Phelps listed.

The hot topic of geothermal falls under the first category, and the Foundation is just wrapping up a \$200,000 grant that helped them develop a plan and a marketing scheme for the future of Mammoth's geothermal growth when the economy turns around. Iceland America Energy, the group that HSEF would like to bring in to help develop the geothermal heating for town, has an economy that is currently struggling even more than the United States.

"We are not trying to use Iceland as our only source, but we want to keep them in the mix," said Phelps, who assessed that a geothermal heating district was still two to three years out.

Another renewables strategy idea for which HSEF is pursuing a grant is a project that would use NPG's internet backbone to track people's energy use.

"The Town could track how much energy it is using as a whole so that we could try to reduce our consumption and then sell it back to the grid," Phelps said. "There is no real cost to the customers, we would just need to show them the lowered costs on their electrical bill to get them interested."

In essence, the project's goal according to HSEF's grant application would be "to develop a fully integrated portfolio of locally available RE [renewable] resources that is managed by a smart grid optimized for efficient energy use and cost reduction." Optimizing the amount of energy would lower the amount needed.

The grant money would be used for the design and research of the project and the matching portion that HSEF would need to provide would be used for the hardware. The idea is still very conceptual, but Phelps thinks Mammoth is the perfect candidate for this project because the town is small and compact.



PHOTO: GEISEL

## A Living Wise kit

The idea could be the wave of the future, as other projects in the United States, such as the greening of the Empire State Building, are keen on the idea of tracking energy consumption via the Internet, too.

When Phelps talked about the other two HSEF strategies, they seem to overlap. Energy efficiency and energy education go hand in hand, since without the education people will not know how to be efficient.

"In the past three years we have helped save 4 million kilowatt hours, or \$600,000, in the Town of Mammoth through energy efficiency," Phelps stated, citing projects such as their light bulb exchanges, which helped make that possible.

While primarily funded through SCE, the Town of Mammoth provides \$25,000 per year to HSEF's \$250,000 budget. This year, due to tough economic times, the Town briefly pondered cutting the funding they provide. They realized, however, that the Energy Initiative is a partnership between the Town and SCE, and the Town's support is required to keep that partnership in place.

Phelps thinks it was a tough situation because, while energy efficiency is profitable for the people of Mammoth, it is not necessarily profitable for the Town. However, SCE provides their support to HSEF through ratepayer dollars, so some may say it should be the people of Mammoth who are profiting anyway.

"Energy is not as tangible as other things like childcare and trails," Phelps stated, "but small increments add up."

HSEF will continue educational programs like Living Wise this year, and will be adding the new Flex Your Power program to their list (see sidebar). However, they will not be holding the High Sierra Energy Summit in 2009. The format and "messaging" will be reworked for a retry in 2010.

## Mammoth students learn about "Living Wise"

During the next few months the High Sierra Energy Foundation's Special Projects Director Leslie O'Berry will kick off several educational programs. First up is the annual Living Wise program for Mammoth Middle School's sixth grade students, now in its third year of existence. The program begins this month and runs for several weeks, integrated into the students' science class. It lays a foundation for them to learn about best water and energy consumption practices.

"I love the Living Wise program," stated O'Berry, who has organized Living Wise all three years. "The kids get so into it and it really does work. We've been accused of turning kids into energy Nazis!"

The program partners with the school and sixth grade science teacher Gil Campos, as well as the Mammoth Community Water District. MCWD provides supplemental funding, as well as an annual field trip to the

wastewater treatment plant, which is always a highlight for the students. SCE and the High Sierra Energy Initiative are also partners, and SCE provides the kits that the students use throughout the program.

The program also involves the students in an Earth Day booth, solar cooking and poster contests, and energy and water efficiency lectures. Added this year is the kids' introduction to the new Flex Your Power program.

Still in its early stages (HSEF just received the grant for the project), Flex Your Power is a community education program that gets people involved by asking them to sign pledges on the ways they will help conserve energy, among other things. Living Wise students will be asked to help gather pledges from community members. The pledges will culminate in a community get-together this Labor Day Weekend. Look for more information on Flex Your Power in the summer 2009 issue of The Green Sheet.

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