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School earns EPA Energy Star rating

By SHAWNA T. TURNER - sturner@sungazette.com

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Article Photos



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From left, David Maciejewski, business manager for East Lycoming School District; Judith Katz, Environmental Protection Agency's Mid-Atlantic Region air protection division director; Suzanne Foresman, Ashkar Elementary principal; and Dr. Susan Bigger, East Lycoming School District Superintendent, show off the EPA Star Energy awards given to Ashkar Elementary in the school's gymnasium Thursday morning. Ashkar was one of only 11 elementary schools in the state to get the Energy Star label.

HUGHESVILLE - The Joseph C. Ashkar Elementary School here on Thursday became one of only 11 elementary schools in the state to earn the Energy Star rating this year.

Only 36 elementary schools have received that distinction since the Environmental Protection Agency's program began several years ago.

Energy costs are typically a school district's second largest operating expense, after salaries, according to the agency. Nationally, utility costs in primary and secondary schools account for about \$6 billion annually.

To qualify for the Energy Star label, the school had to be in the top 25 percent of the EPA's national performance rating system.

"A rating of 75 indicates that the building performs better than 75 percent of similar buildings nationwide. Buildings rated 75 or more qualify for the energy star label. I believe the rating Ashkar got was 83, which is significantly above 75," said Judith M. Katz, director of air protection in EPA's third district.

In 2002, Ashkar's rating was only 30.

The main energy savings at the school was attributed to converting to more energy-efficient lighting.

"It was a complete lighting upgrade," said Richard Skinner, energy engineer for the McClure Co.

There weren't any costly solar panels or geothermal energy systems added at the school.

They upgraded the lighting system, renovated the heating and air conditioning system, and the electric hot water system was replaced with a more efficient gas unit.

A new computerized building automation system was installed to allow for precise temperature control and energy savings in the building, according to Skinner.

Basically, the school stuck with the fundamental basics of energy preservation, without a hefty price tag.

"This work was completed and paid for from energy and operational savings generated from the project. In other words, the district used the savings to pay for the project and did not have to incur additional debt to pay for the project," Skinner said.

The school district began an energy-saving program in 2002 credited with saving the district about \$134,000 in energy costs per year. The total savings from electricity, gas and oil over the last seven years equates to the energy contained in more than 412,000 gallons of gasoline, according to Skinner.

"You can think of this number also as 23,000 fill ups at the gas pump in an average-sized car or the annual energy use of about 542 homes. Environmentally, this is a big impact," Skinner said.