

Phipps Conservatory's Center for Sustainable Landscapes nearly complete

Pittsburgh Business Times by Anya Litvak, Reporter

Date: Friday, November 4, 2011, 6:00am EDT

Related: [Environment](#), [Energy](#)

A trio of green energy technologies meant to net out the energy use at [Phipps Conservatory's](#) upcoming Center for Sustainable Landscapes is nearly complete.

The building's motto is to use very little energy, and what energy it must use will be offset by a 125-kilowatt solar panel array, a network of geothermal wells and a 10-kilowatt wind turbine.

The solar panels have been operational since September, but Phipps Executive Director [Richard Piacentini](#) said it's too early to tell if they're performing as expected. The geothermal wells, which cool or heat water to the earth's constant 57 degrees, are drilled and installed but have yet to be hooked up to the facility. Installation of the wind turbine is expected within the next week.

Construction on the \$10 million Center for Sustainable Landscapes began last year and is scheduled to be complete in April, with a move-in date set for May.

"A lot of it has to do with figuring out how to use as little energy as possible," said Piacentini of the building's design.

For example, all employees in the new building will have laptops instead of desktops to conserve energy. And when the temperature outside rises to a certain level, those laptops will urge their users to open windows. If it gets even higher, they might be asked to close the windows and turn on dry air.

"Most of the time in our buildings, people are totally disconnected" from what goes on outside, Piacentini said. "Our whole point is to link people with the environment and nature."

Proving that the new center is truly net zero energy will take at least a year — that's when Phipps will be able to measure if the energy produced by its green technologies balanced out the building's use.