

# Business Outlook



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Tucumcari college wants to teach windmill technology

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BUSINESS OUTLOOK 3

# College wants to be a wind center

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An eastern New Mexico community college has moved a step closer to realizing its ambition to become a national training center for the wind power industry.

Mesalands Community College in Tucumcari has received the thumbs up in a study that looked at the feasibility of establishing a training program for wind turbine maintenance workers.

College officials commissioned the study because they believe the program would meet the needs of the swiftly growing wind power industry. They plan to call it the North American Wind Research and Training Center.

The research was conducted for the college by the Regional Development Corp., a private, nonprofit, economic development organization with ties to Los Alamos National Laboratory, and the Idea Group of Santa Fe, which specializes in strategic marketing.

It reaffirmed the need for qualified workers and pointed to a scarcity of training programs. Mesalands' location, near the state's three large wind farms, make it ideally suited for a training center.

The study suggested that the center could become a resource for research on the best maintenance techniques and practices, which could then be used nationwide.

If built, the center would



COURTESY MESALANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

This architects' sketch shows what the North American Wind Research and Training Center would look like at Tucumcari. The turbines are shown smaller than the utility-scale turbines the college wants.

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provide up to 40 permanent jobs for instructors, researchers and support staff. The economic impact for the local economy from construction and related spending would be about \$17 million, the study said.

Armed with these results, college officials plan to seek financing.

"The feasibility study gives you ammunition in hand to go

out to folks to say this is a viable project," said Mesalands spokesman John Yearout.

College officials met this month with Sen. Jeff Bingaman D-N.M., seeking his help to secure \$2 million in federal funds to help purchase a wind turbine for the center.

State Rep. Brian Moore, R-Clayton, has agreed to

sponsor a capital outlay request of up to \$12 million during the 2006 legislative session for the project.

Capital outlay requests are financed through the state severance tax, which comes from oil and natural gas revenues.

The study estimated the startup cost to build and staff the center at \$9.6 million. That figure does not include the purchase of a wind turbine.

College officials want to erect a wind turbine similar to those used at commercial wind farms. Mesalands has received a quote of \$1.7 million from General Electric Corp. for a wind turbine capable of generating 1.5 megawatts, or enough

electricity for about 1,000 households.

"Getting the turbine is the first critical component," said Mesalands president Phillip O. Barry.

The turbine would serve as a training tool for students; it could also help sustain the program financially, the study said.

The college could use electricity from the turbine and any excess could be sold.

"We're working every angle we can think of," Yearout said.

College officials met last month with FPL Energy, which owns and operates the 204-megawatt New Mexico Wind Energy Center near Fort Sumner, to plan a training curriculum.