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Sustainable lighting blows into high school parking lot

By Patricia Robert

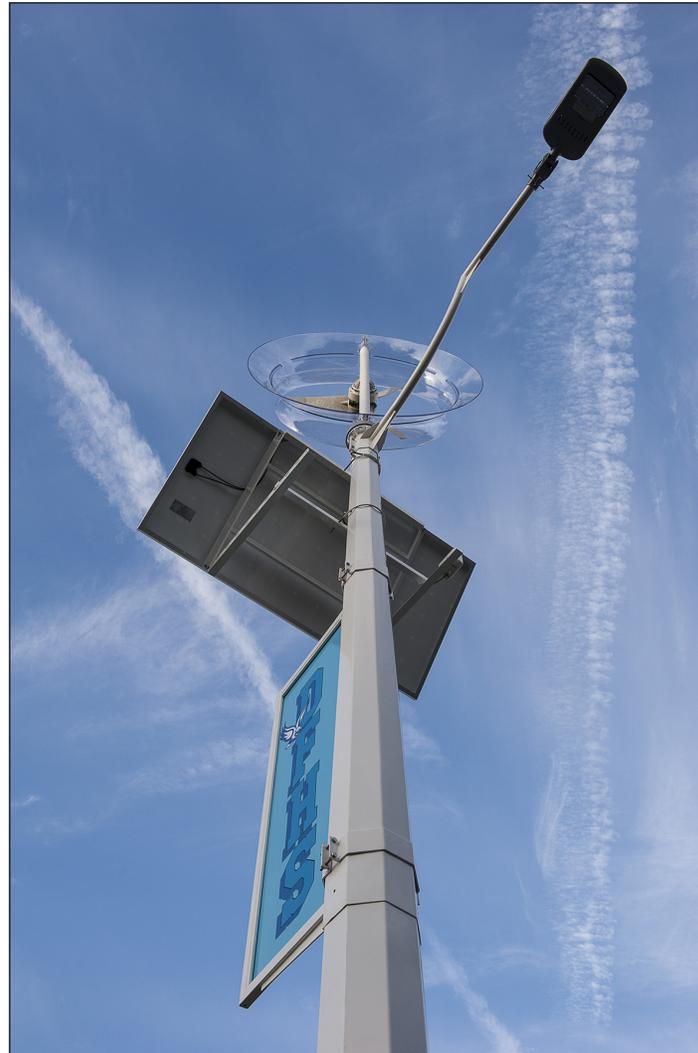
Traffic slowdowns on Broadway (Route 9) by Dobbs Ferry High School will be forgiven as motorists do a double take to re-examine three poles in the school's parking lot that look more like space-age sculptures than serviceable lighting.

What they are, in fact, are Remote Power Units (RPUs) that were installed on Aug. 3. The devices are totally off grid and provide an area of roughly 100 feet with lighting, which covers 12 parking spaces. They meet the school's practical needs, and are a tip of the hat to the earth-friendly goal of sustainability.

"We had this area of our parking lot that was really a dark zone and we needed to find a way to bring sufficient lighting to the space," said Dave Robertin, director of facilities for the Dobbs Ferry School District for the past two years. "The cost to dig the trenches for the installation of wiring just wasn't feasible, so we started looking for alternatives.

"We are very consciously looking for ways of going toward LED lighting, as it is very efficient and allows us to shrink our carbon footprint, so to speak, and we very much want to do that," he continued.

In the fall of 2016, Robertin attended a meeting of the Southeastern Chapter of the New York State School Facilities at which representatives of Aris Renewable Energy, a Mount Vernon start-up firm, made a presentation about their solar



One of the Remote Power Units outside the high school.

and wind-powered equipment. Robertin was impressed.

Through further discussions he found that Aris could manufacture a lighting device that would fit the school's parking

lot needs, and for a relatively modest price. According to Robertin, there was no need to break up the asphalt, which saved a significant sum, and the lights are self sufficient, with a

life expectancy of 20 years. Plus, if there is a power outage in other parts of Dobbs Ferry, this area will still have light.

Aris was hired and the project went forward, overseen in large measure by Dan Connors, chief operating officer and one of the company's founders. The company has also installed security lighting at the Washington Irving School in Tarrytown.

"We decided on making the poles just under 30 feet high for DFHS, which fit in with the planning and zoning of the area, and at that height, the light won't hit you in the eyeballs and makes it more aesthetic," Connors said. "They are made of galvanized steel, with the batteries and electrical cords, or the brains, at the bottom. RPUs are totally off grid, with absolutely no underground wiring.

"And yes, they do have the look of a windmill, but we call them a wind turbine and each is 4 feet in diameter. They are surrounded by a specially engineered 'shroud,' which has a 6-foot outer diameter. This is made of Plexiglas. The shroud enhances the wind speed and power contribution, which is important to generate some wind power at low wind speeds," Connors concluded.

The lights are renewable and resilient, and research into how they function will evoke the synergy between wind and sun, the natural cycles of night and day, winter and summer. In short, the lights in the parking lot at Dobbs Ferry High School are worth a second look.