

Local sub-contractors hired for BSU's geothermal project

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MUNCIE -- Ball State University has awarded its first contract -- for \$13 million -- in connection with the construction of the \$65 million to \$70 million geothermal energy project to heat and cool the campus.

Messer Construction, a multi-state construction manager with offices in Indianapolis and other cities, has been named the general contractor, BSU President Jo Ann Gora told the university's board of trustees on Friday.

The project so far has 16 sub-contractors, all American companies, 11 of which are Indiana businesses, she reported.

Six of the sub-contractors are local: including 3D and JG Case (earth moving), E&B Paving, Randall Miller (surveying), City Fence and Rundell Ernstberger Associates (erosion control).

Six drillers -- three from Indiana and three from Minnesota -- have begun drilling 4,000 boreholes at the maximum rate of two boreholes a day. Each hole will be 400 feet deep.

The clean energy project will replace two of BSU's four coal-fired boilers by 2011, which is ahead of schedule, Gora said.

The university remains in "hot pursuit" of federal stimulus dollars to help pay for the project, which has generated national publicity, the president said.

A geothermal heat pump system is a heating and cooling system using Earth's ability to store heat. It uses Earth as either a heat source, when operating in heating mode, or a heat sink, when operating in cooling mode, according to Ball State.

The ground a few feet below surface has a very stable temperature throughout the year. Geothermal heat pumps draw that available heat in the winter and sink heat into the ground in the summer. Geothermal systems transfer heat from one place to another.

BSU's system will circulate water down into the ground in a closed-loop system.