

NLACC Response to Rensselaer Refinery Visit

On February 7 a group of local residents and two newspaper reporters drove to Rensselaer to have a look at a new ethanol refinery owned by Iroquois Bio-Energy Co. LLC. An account of their trip was subsequently published in the Warsaw Times Union (written by Teresa Smith) on February 8 and in the Mail Journal (written by Tim Ashley) on February 14. As reflected in the newspaper articles, some of these residents concluded that since they found nothing wrong with the Iroquois refinery that day, then therefore there is nothing wrong with building the proposed VeraSun refinery in Milford.

Our group, The Northern Lakes Area Concerned Citizens (NLACC), and the large number of citizens who have signed our petition, are opposed to locating the VeraSun refinery in its proposed Milford location. We have received numerous phone calls and e-mails requesting us to respond to the Times Union and Mail Journal articles. Here is our response.

Two of the local residents visiting the Iroquois refinery that day were Brad Jackson and Ron Truex, Kosciusko County Commissioners. Although they will not have a direct vote on the zoning exception needed by VeraSun to proceed with its project, they nevertheless have a strong influence on the politics of decision making in county government. We assume that their purpose in visiting the Rensselaer refinery was to try and obtain information that would help guide them in their recommendations for this important zoning decision affecting Milford's future. We applaud them for the time and effort they have put into better understanding this issue. Another group of the visitors was comprised of Fred, Larry and Steve Weisser and Tracy and Barney Beer. The Weissers and Tracy and Barney Beer's father (Harlan) are owners of land that will be sold to VeraSun for its refinery. They will benefit financially if VeraSun is given the green light, so we assume it was in the Weissers' and Beers' best interest to make as many positive comments as possible about the Iroquois refinery during their visit with reporters in order to influence a positive outcome on the VeraSun zoning decision. Both newspaper articles also quoted comments from un-named "local residents" and "local businessmen". Many Milford and Syracuse/Wawasee residents have contacted the NLACC and are asking who these individuals were, and why they were not named in the articles. We are also curious why these un-named sources are wishing to influence the outcome of the VeraSun decision while remaining anonymous.

In the Times Union article, Jasper County Sheriff, Orville Perry was quoted as saying "*there haven't been any problems at the Iroquois Bio-Energy Co.'s ethanol plant*". The Iroquois refinery started producing ethanol on January 19. In other words, it had been in production only 18 days when visited by the local group. We feel this is not a sufficient time period to adequately assess its effect on the surrounding community. In addition, no mention was made in the article of whether the refinery was in full production, or merely in a preliminary startup mode that would gradually increase to full production in the future.

(Times Union) "*The Iroquois Plant...is one-third the size of the proposed VeraSun plant.*" The Iroquois refinery will produce 40 million gallons of ethanol a year and it was noted that it is located on 70 acres of land. The proposed VeraSun refinery will produce 120 million gallons of ethanol a year and will be located on a 230 acre site. The VeraSun refinery will be 3 times bigger than Iroquois. We feel this is like comparing apples to oranges.

"*We stopped by the school, a Syracuse businessman said, "The principal was surprised when we asked about an emergency plan, in case something happened at the ethanol plant."*" As mentioned in the Times Union and Mail Journal articles, the Iroquois refinery is located 2 miles from town in a sparsely populated area, and three and one half miles from Rensselaer Central High School. Apparently community officials feel they are far enough away and not in any danger. We hope they are right, and wish them well in the future. The VeraSun refinery will be within approximately one mile of Milford Elementary and Middle Schools, a pre-school, Milford Day Care Center, a nursing home, a senior living center, nine churches, over seven hundred homes and Milford's downtown business district. This is just too close to locate an industrial facility that will be producing 120 million gallons per year of a hazardous fuel such as ethanol. As noted in VeraSun's IDEM application, there will be above-ground tank storage, with capacity

for 3.6 million gallons of ethanol and gasoline. In addition, as seen on VeraSun's site plan of the facility, there is a large oval railway track system encircling the property that would be capable of accommodating many tanker cars full of ethanol waiting to be shipped. We know that VeraSun will attempt to be as safe as possible, and will try to follow state and federal safety guidelines in handling and storing such volatile liquids as ethanol and the other chemicals needed at the refinery. But nevertheless, accidents can happen. If a major fuel spill, fire or explosion occurred, the people of Milford could be in imminent danger. A quick evacuation of the town's schools, senior facilities, businesses & homes would be a logistical nightmare.

(Mail Journal) *"Glenda Shank, lab manager, said there is no pollution generated by the plant."* We take issue with the comment about no pollution being generated. What the lab manager probably meant was that the Iroquois refinery does not exceed the upper limits of hazardous emissions as mandated by the EPA and IDEM. We don't expect VeraSun to exceed those limits either. Nevertheless, according to VeraSun's own figures in filing for their IDEM air emissions permit, they will be generating 477 tons-per-year of "Total Air Emissions". "Total Air Emissions" represents chemicals and substances that are all, in one way or another, health hazards. You can read more detailed information about these chemicals and our concerns of how they will affect the health of our citizens and our lakes by accessing our website at www.milfordethanol.com and clicking on "Pollution Emissions" on our homepage.

(Mail Journal) *"We wanted to make sure it was a surprise visit," Jackson said. "We didn't notice hardly any smell to it."* (Times Union) *"If we didn't know where the plant was, we wouldn't have known by the smell," Truex said. "We had to stick our heads out the window like dogs to get the faintest odor."* We wouldn't expect there to be much detectable odor on a cold winter day. The emissions leaving an ethanol refinery smokestack have been heated by thermal-oxidizing equipment to extract enough hazardous pollutants to stay within EPA guidelines. The remaining hot pollutants that do leave the smokestack would rise quickly into the cold dry air of winter. The time of year we are most concerned about is late spring, summer and early fall. It is during this time of year that we can experience the kind of hot humid Midwest weather that gave birth to the saying "you could almost hear the corn grow". When these hazardous chemicals leave an ethanol refinery on a calm, humid 90-degree day, they hang in the air. They spread out slowly, competing for space with the oxygen we breathe. It is these kinds of conditions caused by these types of chemicals that have the potential to generate smog and the "ozone alert" days that we are accustomed to hearing on news and weather reports. And it is these hazardous conditions that we think could possibly endanger the health of our children, the elderly and those with respiratory problems. In addition, as spelled out in more detail on our website, the large amounts of nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxides emitted by the VeraSun refinery might have a detrimental effect on our area lakes.

(Times Union) *"There was very little traffic on Ind. 114 to the plant and none of it included semi tractors hauling corn."* The group visiting the Iroquois refinery that day saw very little truck traffic. We are not sure why, unless the refinery is not yet operating to full capacity. We do know, though, that VeraSun, in their IDEM application, has estimated there will be approximately 48,000 grain trucks a year traveling to their refinery. Many of these trucks will be driving through Milford, coming from the south on State Road 15, and crossing the path that many of Milford's children walk to school. In addition, there will be increased traffic coming from the south on State Road 13 through Syracuse and down the Syracuse/Milford Road (CR 1350 N), which is a major school bus route used to transport our children to Milford, Syracuse and Wawasee High Schools. We know that the grain trucks hauling corn will have the proper licenses, and their drivers will try to drive as safely as possible. But the sheer numbers of these large heavy vehicles traveling the same roads as our children creates a dangerous mix. Accidents do happen, regardless of best intentions.

(Times Union) *"The people around here are more concerned with big dairy and hog operations coming in," Perry said* We assume the sheriff was talking about how the public has become increasingly aware of problems such as insects, odor and manure application associated with these large confined animal operations. Ironically, we have found a lot of information linking ethanol refineries to just such facilities. One of the by-products left over after corn is converted to ethanol is DDG, a corn-based product that can be fed to cattle. There is a great deal of this feed produced at a refinery the size of VeraSun's, and the most efficient and economical way to sell this product is to large feedlots that would be located as close to the refinery as possible. Not only do we think that VeraSun's ethanol refinery is inappropriate near the Milford and Syracuse/Wawasee area, but we are afraid that, if built, it would give birth to other nearby undesirable facilities.

(Mail Journal) *"Mayor Herbert Arihood...said there was some concern expressed about the amount of water to be used, but it was later discovered the ethanol plant would use different water aquifers than used by the town."* We are also concerned about water. VeraSun will draw over one million gallons of water per day from the local aquifer. We assume, because of its close proximity to Milford, it will be using the same aquifer source as the town. Local area lakes such as Camelot Lakes, just down the road from VeraSun, have already noticed consistently lower lake water levels in recent years. The common consensus of residents is that these lower levels are at least in part due to the ever increasing irrigation of farmland by local farmers. Unlike VeraSun, though, our local farmers are only pulling water from the ground for part of the year, which allows for partial replenishing of the aquifer from rain & snowfall during the fall, winter and spring. VeraSun, on the other hand, will be pumping water 365 days-a-year.

(Mail Journal) *"Jackson said... 'nobody there was in opposition to it.'"* Our group, the NLACC, has spent thousands of hours researching the ethanol industry since we first formed last fall. One of the common threads we have found relating to ethanol is that many of the existing ethanol refineries, as well as many that have been announced, are located in areas around towns whose economic lifeblood revolves almost entirely around agriculture. These communities live or die based on the price of grain and livestock. Agriculture is a fickle industry at best. In recent years, the low price of grain has created many hardships on farm families, many of which have been forced to sell-out. The explosion of the alternative-fuels industry in the last couple of years has been a godsend for these communities. The current price of corn, if it continues, will mean a drastic change for the better for many farm families. Therefore, in these communities where the economy is so dependent on agriculture, a person finds little or no opposition to large ethanol refineries coming to town. Very few questions are asked about safety, pollution, water depletion, odor or traffic. Anyone asking these questions is viewed as the enemy.

Milford and its close neighbor, the Syracuse/Wawasee community, are much different from these mostly-agriculture based areas. Although Milford has a rich agriculture history, its economy has evolved over the years into a healthy mix that includes, among its numerous businesses, world-class manufacturing facilities and a regionally leading publishing company. The Syracuse/Wawasee area combines a healthy mix of agriculture and manufacturing with one of the most desirable vacation/resort areas in the state. Both communities, unlike many other rural areas, have continued to be a destination-of-choice for people looking for a community in which to raise their families. It is this social and economic mix that has emboldened many people in our communities to question the feasibility of locating such a large industrial refinery such as VeraSun's in our community. These same people, all good citizens, realize that our nation needs to become less dependent on foreign oil. They all know that the bio-fuels industry, wind and solar energy and other energy conservation measures will eventually make our country stronger through energy self-sufficiency. But they also know that the way in which we build our infrastructure in creating these industries must be done so that it does not take away from, but rather enhances our quality of life. Recently, we have been pleased that others outside our community are also acknowledging our rights concerning this quality of life issue. For one, we would like to thank our governor, Mitch Daniels, for his support. In his radio interview just last Wednesday, Feb. 14, with Stacey Page on Warsaw's WRSW 107.3, he stated, *"...you know with many of the rest of the growth areas in agriculture, local people should have the determination. It's a big state and if the folks in Milford don't want that plant, and there will be a lot of other places that do, it should never go where local folks truly think it will subtract and not add to the quality of life."*

Unlike the un-named "local residents" in the Mail-Journal and Times Union articles, we as NLACC steering committee members are proud to be identified with our position on the Milford ethanol site selection issue. We have absolutely nothing to hide; we are confident in our facts, because they come from reliable sources such as VeraSun itself, the Department of Environmental Management, and the Department of Energy. We also have no profit motive. Our only motive is protecting our community. We cannot give enough thanks to the many people in our area who have joined with us and whom we represent - people who got involved so that their children and grandchildren will grow up in a community that has struck the proper balance between economy and a safe way of life.

NLACC (Northern Lakes Area Concerned Citizens) – committee members Bill Appenzeller, Phil Beer, Bob Bowerman, Sandee Buhrt, Tina Fraley, Lisa Glon, Angel Hardy, Ann Schlabach and Lisa Weisser.