

## New school zone lights really work

Michelle Bates, Editor

The school speed zone lights have finally been installed at the Homer and Haynesville school zones.

With the hard work of many, the solar-powered units were assembled and installed the latter part of last week.

Joe Wise, owner of Solar Traffic Controls out of Tempe, Arizona, described the school zone safety lights as energy efficient, because it uses batteries charged from solar energy and LED lights, which draw less energy than conventional electrical utilities. These units will not be connected to any utilities.

It also works differently than the conventional school zone safety signs and lights. The yellow caution lights will come on at a designated time, set by the Claiborne Parish School Board. When a car comes into the school zone, a radar built into the unit will flash a number, showing the driver the speed at which they are traveling inside the school zone.

"It'll show them their speed, and hopefully they'll slow down," Wise said.

These new units are very beneficial for the communities in which they are installed, Wise said. According to the company's website, benefits include its cost effectiveness, low installation and operating costs, virtually no maintenance, increases public safety and it is designed specifically for the community where they are used.

"Preliminary studies have indicated that the use of both units (LED lamps and radar speed displays) has a significant impact on motorists' compliance with school zone driving restrictions," the website said.

Janet Holland, school board technology supervisor, said she is pleased to see this long awaited project come to fruition. "Today (Thursday, February 12), they are finally being put together and installed after a year of hard work," she said.

Some work is still being done, because old signs need to be taken up as well as cleanup of other materials. Holland said the entire project should be complete soon. She did ask drivers to be patient while old signage is being removed. Follow the speed limit on the new signs; when the caution lights are flashing, the speed limit is as it has always been, 25 miles per hour.

This project has come to fruition through the efforts of many throughout Claiborne Parish. The safety of the communities'



The Guardian-Journal photos/Michelle Bates

**The newly installed school zone speed radar and caution lights worked as soon as they were installed. This driver, pictured above, slowed down to just 18 miles per hour when the vehicle's speed flashed across the radar. The units were installed in Homer and Haynesville school zones Friday, February 13.**

children has been paramount in the minds of Haynesville citizens for a long time and has been addressed several times at the town council meetings.

This need was reinforced after a child was hit by a car in front of Haynesville Junior/Senior High School last year.

In fact, they said if the money could not be found through a grant program of some sort or through the school board, then the council would take action themselves. With the growing urgency to update the signage in the school zones in Haynesville, Claiborne Parish Police Juror Bob McDaniel, also a resident of Haynesville, began looking into the issue.

After some investigation, a grant was found that fit the need perfectly. "Safe Routes to School," a grant in which its initiative is battling childhood obesity, fit the parish's need perfectly.

This grant was presented to the Claiborne Parish School Board at the recommendation of Haynesville Mayor Sherman Brown, and it was awarded in May 2008. After the grant had been awarded, it was sent to the state in order to draw up a contract, get approval and send it back to the school board. The contract was received in July of that year, and it was then forwarded back to the state, which in turn, sent it to the federal government.

According to the school board's records, the federal government did not actually release the funds until October 2008. Once the funds were released, it took the company awarded the contract six weeks to manufacture and assemble the units.

These units were delivered in January, while holes were dug and concrete poured in preparation for installation. According to Holland, the concrete had to cure for a full 28 days before the installation could proceed.

The "Safe Routes to School" program actually came from a federal legislative bill called SAFETEA-LU (Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users).

According to the Federal Highway Administration's website, the eligible use of these funds "include sidewalk improvements, traffic calming and speed reduction improvements, pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements, on-street bicycle facilities, off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities, secure bike parking and traffic diversion improvements in the vicinity of schools (within approximately 2 miles)."

Of the \$9 million grant received by Louisiana, the Claiborne Parish School Board, only one of eight to receive approval for this grant, received \$24,800.

The culmination of this grant will come in April, when the Homer and Haynesville schools will participate in a "Walk to School" Day. This day has been set aside to promote exercise by making it safe for children to walk or ride their bikes to school.

On this day, school faculty as well as parents and community members will gather at a designated point, forming a "human bus." Children will walk together in designated walking areas to the school.



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**Claiborne Parish School Board Transportation Supervisor Ronnie McKenzie works to tighten up the solar panel on the speed radar unit in Haynesville. These units were installed in Homer and Haynesville school zones on Friday, February 13. The funding for these units came from the "Safe Routes to School" program.**