THE DAILY NEWS
Greenville, Belding and Montcalm County, Michigan

12/22/2010 8:00:00 PM

Sunny delight

Community Center is latest Greenville facility to get solar panels on roof

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GREENVILLE - Greenville got greener this week.

An installation crew from United Solar Ovonic worked with Feyen Zylstra in Grand Rapids on Monday and Tuesday to install a 12-kilowatt (kW) solar panel system on the Greenville Area Community Center's roof.

The project is expected to produce about 5 to 10 percent of the community center's electricity based on current usage.

Sam Ajwah of Grand Rapids, a field operations project manager in the Midwest for United Solar, is overseeing the project for the company and making sure the system is being installed to its specifications. He said the project is the company's first installation of its new PowerTilt system in Michigan.

Most United Solar products are glued or affixed directly onto a roof surface. The PowerTilt system includes a lightweight metal frame bolted to the roof that allows the solar panels to tilt upward at a 15-degree angle.

"The beauty of this product is you can install it in this weather," Ajwah said, standing on the community center's ice-covered roof. "This is something we couldn't do with our traditional product. The other good thing is it's tilted so it produces a little more power."

He said United Solar's engineers settled on the 15-degree angle as the best to point the panels at the sun without casting a shadow on other rows of panels.

Crews from United Solar Ovonic and Feyen Zylstra worked together to install the Greenville Area Community Center's solar panel system.

Lighting retrofit set to begin at community center

GREENVILLE - Electric bills will be much smaller at the Greenville Area Community Center next year.

Along with a 12-kilowatt solar panel system being installed on the roof that will provide about 10 percent of the facility's electricity, the Greenville City Council awarded a bid to G&D Electric on Tuesday to replace lights and fixtures with more efficient models.

Community Center Director Paul Temerowski said the project will reduce the general lighting from 30,000 watts to about 10,000 watts, saving about $5,000 annually in electric costs. But the lights actually will be brighter.

"We should have a whole new community center," Temerowski said.

The project is scheduled to begin on Jan. 3 and be completed in 30 days or less. It is being funded partially with an $18,400 grant from the Greenville Area Community Foundation.

"We're pretty excited about this product and having it just a few miles from our plant," Ajwah said. "So it's pretty exciting project."

The crews began working on the project Monday and had the metal structure installed by the end of Tuesday. Next week, they plan to run wires hooking the panels together and tie them into the facility's electrical system.

"It's going well so far," Ajwah said. "We're hoping to get it connected to the building by the end of this year."

The community center is the latest of seven publicly owned facilities in Greenville to receive solar panels over the next year capable of generating about 500 kW of electricity. The project is being dubbed "GreenERville."

Greenville High School and Lincoln Heights Elementary School both received solar panel systems capable of generating 101 kW of electricity over the summer and fall. Greenville Public Schools Superintendent Pete Haines said early results are promising for the project.

"We're in the low period for the year - the least potential generation due to shorter days and angle of sunlight - but our late fall, which are marginal months, were better than anticipated," he said.

Haines expects much better power generation in the summer months, when the days are longer and the sun is the highest in the sky. The spring and fall are considered marginal months for solar panels.

Two Greenville Municipal Airport hangars and City Hall received a system capable of generating more than 180 kW. Installation was completed this fall and City Manager George Bosanic is pleased with its performance so far.

"The system is fully operational and is functioning about 8 to 10 percent better than estimated," he said. "All energy is flowing back to the grid."

The airport's new terminal received a 5 kW solar panel system when it was constructed about two years ago and the new pump house at the city's wellfield on Fairplains Street received another 5 kW system this summer.

Bosanic hopes to expand that system in the future.

A ground mounted 75 kW solar panel system is being planned for Greenville's wastewater treatment plant along the Flat River. Bosanic expects that will be installed in February.