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MMWEC launches turnkey solar energy program for municipal utilities

State official praises renewable energy, business development aspects of program

LUDLOW, Mass. – July 9, 2008 – The Commonwealth’s solar energy footprint will be expanding to communities served by Massachusetts municipal utilities under a new program announced today by the Massachusetts Municipal Wholesale Electric Company (MMWEC).

Using all Massachusetts-based products and services, the program offers one-stop solar project shopping for municipal utilities, which can purchase solar energy panels, electric current inverters and project installation services through a single contract with MMWEC.

“The MMWEC program offers a streamlined and cost-effective method for municipal utilities to develop the potential for solar energy within their communities,” said MMWEC Chief Executive Officer Ronald C. DeCurzio. “This is the kind of initiative needed to supplement municipal utility power supplies with solar and other renewable energy resources as a hedge against the rising cost of power generated by fossil fuels,” he said.

Massachusetts Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles praised the program for its support of in-state renewable energy businesses as well as its potential for bringing additional solar energy projects into operation.

"I think it's great that the municipal power and light companies are pitching in toward Governor Patrick's goal of putting 250 megawatts of solar electric power in place by 2017," said Secretary Bowles. "This all-Massachusetts program will not only promote renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Bay State, it will also stimulate the growth of our clean energy industry, starting with Evergreen Solar."

MMWEC has contracted with Evergreen Solar, Inc., to provide solar photovoltaic panels to municipal utilities participating in the program. Evergreen Solar, which manufactures solar panels with its proprietary, low-cost String Ribbon™ wafer technology, is about to open new manufacturing facilities in Devens, Mass., that ultimately will employ approximately 800 people.

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“We applaud MMWEC and its member utilities’ ability and commitment to get a program up and running and making it easy to get solar installations in place right here in the communities of Massachusetts,” said Evergreen Chairman, President and CEO Rick Feldt. “The speed with which they implemented this program is very impressive. We are pleased to be a part of their program.”

Solectria Renewables LLC, based in Lawrence, Mass., will provide MMWEC with the inverters needed to convert direct-current solar energy to alternating-current electricity for use on local distribution systems. Solectria Renewables designs and manufactures power electronics for renewable generation systems, including a range of solar inverters to fit the size and budget of specific projects.

MMWEC also has entered into agreements with Massachusetts-based contractors to install solar projects in municipal utility communities. The contractors, prequalified by MMWEC, will provide a variety of services, from project assessment and proposal development through construction, testing and project commissioning.

MMWEC has contracted with Evergreen to purchase up to 500 kilowatts of solar panels for the first phase of the program, which runs through December 2008. Eight municipal utilities already have committed to purchasing more than 100 kilowatts of solar panels, including several that are planning to install demonstration solar systems on high-profile, municipal buildings, in part to promote additional solar development with the community.

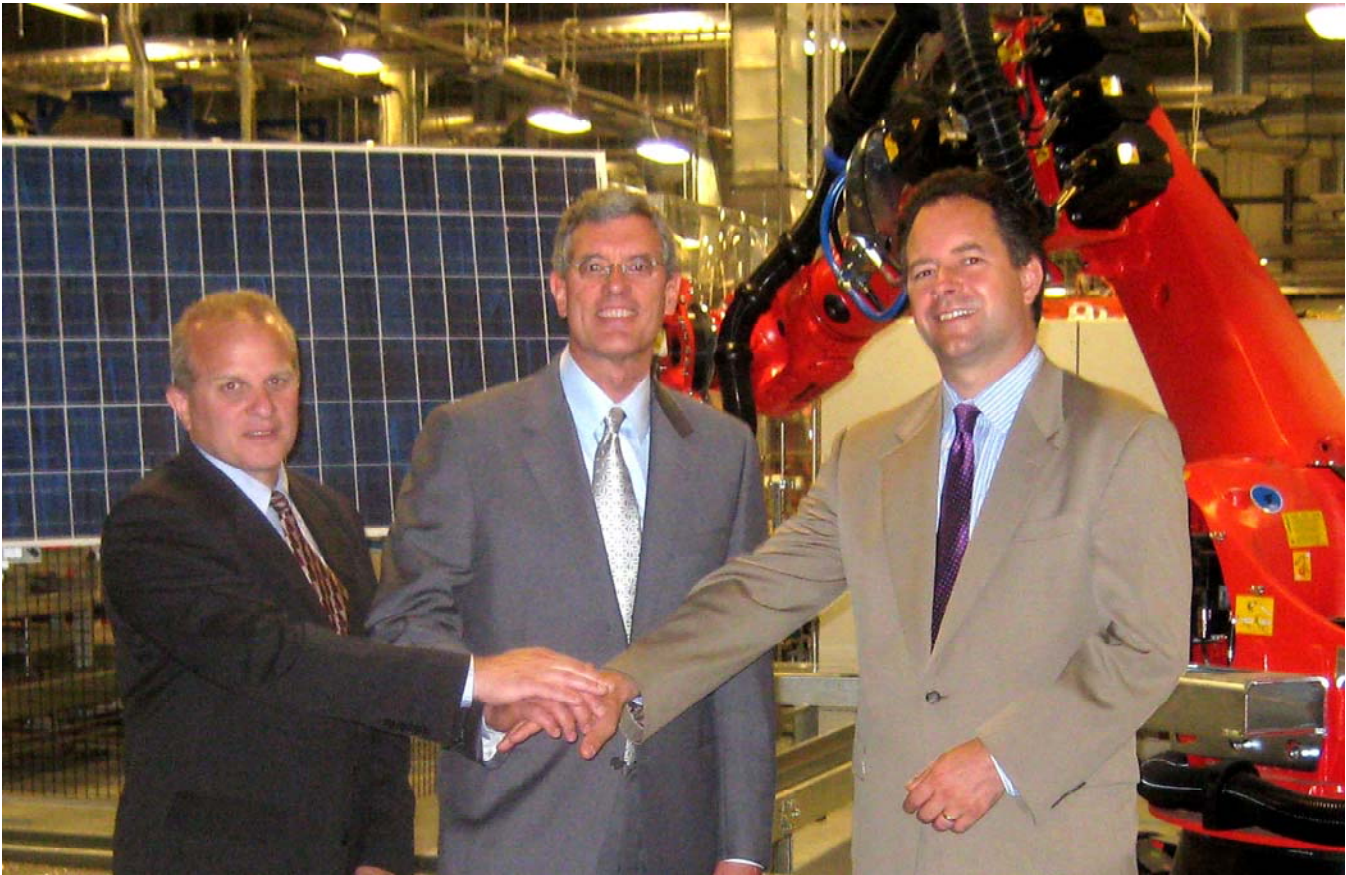
“Our initial thought was to use the municipal installations to demonstrate the feasibility of these projects to other customers, but the interest in developing solar energy is high and customers already are stepping forward and requesting panels,” DeCurzio said. “The program is off to a strong start because people are looking for alternatives to meet their energy needs, and solar is a viable alternative as traditional energy costs continue to rise,” he said.

The MMWEC program complements the state’s Commonwealth Solar program, which provides rebates for solar installations from the state’s Renewable Energy Trust and other sources funded by customers of investor-owned utilities. Because municipal utilities currently do not contribute to the trust, their customers are not eligible for the Commonwealth Solar program rebates, although the municipal utilities are exploring potential incentives.

MMWEC’s program brings a turnkey solar development program with below-wholesale costs to the state’s 40 municipal utilities, which serve approximately 400,000 customers in 58 Massachusetts communities.

MMWEC is a non-profit, public corporation and political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that provides a variety of power supply, financial and other services to the state’s consumer-owned, municipal utilities.

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SOLAR HANDSHAKE – Joining forces in support of MMWEC’s solar program for municipal utilities are, from left, MMWEC Chief Executive Officer Ronald C. DeCurzio, Evergreen Solar Chairman, President and CEO Richard M. Feldt and Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian A. Bowles. MMWEC has contracted with Evergreen Solar to provide the program’s solar panels, manufactured at Evergreen’s new plant in Devens, Mass., shown in the background.

(A high-resolution, electronic copy of this photo suitable for publication in color or black & white is available by contacting David Tuohey at MMWEC at 413-308-1392 or at dtuohey@mmwec.org.)