

# IOM

INSIGHT ON MANUFACTURING

CONNECTING COMPANIES WITH SKILLED WORKERS  
AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN THE NEW NORTH

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## Feature

Solar plant bolsters Manitowoc County's sustainable energy reputation

## Back Office

New OSHA rules allow flexibility on protecting against falls



# A brave new world

In the face of uncertainty, experts and companies ponder the future of free trade agreements

# Let there be light

## SOLAR PLANT BOLSTERS MANITOWOC COUNTY'S ENERGY REPUTATION

BY JESSICA THIEL



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEXTERA ENERGY RESOURCES

Bryan Garner, manager of communications for NextEra, says a solar plant planned near Two Rivers will use photovoltaic technology, as shown here, which manufactures electricity within the panel itself and in turn transmits it to the grid.

WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT of a new solar energy center north of Two Rivers, Manitowoc County took its biggest step yet in establishing itself as a hub for sustainable energy.

WPPI Energy and NextEra Energy Resources unveiled plans to build the 100-megawatt center — the largest in Wisconsin — on land adjacent to the Point Beach Nuclear Plant. When completed in 2021, it will have capacity to serve more than 23,000 customers in three states with clean energy.

Bryan Garner, manager of communications for NextEra, says the project was an ideal fit for his company, a leading developer of wind and sun energy, and WPPI, which was looking to diversify.

Garner says ease of transport and infrastructure made Two Rivers a good site for a solar plant. Solar energy uses a large amount of land, and the facility will take a good portion of the land around the nuclear plant, he says.

“It’s a great opportunity for some of the smaller utilities to benefit from renewable energy,” says Garner, whose company also owns and operates the Point Beach Nuclear Plant.

One of those companies is Two Rivers Water & Light, which plans to buy solar energy from WPPI. “We’re just delighted,” says Ken Kozak, electric utility director.

Between nuclear and solar energy, Kozak notes that the region will soon produce energy

**Left: A technician finishes assembling the three separate LED arrays together into a single fixture and preps the wiring for the electronic drivers. Right: The technician in front connects electronic drivers to the LED arrays.**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ENERGYBANK

from two zero-carbon emissions sources. He says the development helps further the utility's objective of buying stable and reliable, renewable sources of energy.

The solar plant, which will add 150 to 200 jobs during its construction period in 2021, will join a flourishing sustainable energy cluster in the lakefront area. Manitowoc is already home to companies devoted to the LED lighting and wind industries.

Neal Verfuert, founder and

CEO of LED lighting manufacturer energybank, says he's happy to see the site near the nuclear plant repurposed for the solar plant. He isn't surprised to see the abundance of sustainable energy companies in the area, and says he's observed the phenomenon in many places.

"You'll see this concentration of industries," he says. "It's amazing how it works out that way."

For his company, Verfuert says, Manitowoc makes perfect sense. It's

centrally located for shipping, and the area offers skilled laborers with a strong work ethic. In addition, he says, it allows access to strong subcontractors and other companies that can support his manufacturing operations.

Verfuert says that while people are coming around to LED, it can take some convincing. "It's a little more challenging with LED than fluorescent because the payoff is a little longer."

Energybank, however, is winning over customers with its technology using reflective lenses to create a comfortable lighting environment, Verfuert says. Energybank is doing especially well with auto dealers, and he sees potential in the industrial, retail, health care and school sectors.

"They're delighted with what we're doing for them," Verfuert says. "They like the light as well as the savings."... *(remainder of article deleted)*



PHOTO COURTESY OF ENERGYBANK

**An energybank technician completes a test of the fixture. Every fixture is energized and checked to make sure all of the components are working prior to being shipped.**