

INSIGHT

SHIFTING PRIORITIES

New approach needed to attract, recruit young workers

CONNECTIONS

Mile of Music organizers aim to add value for businesses

Performa CEO Jeff Kanzelberger, pictured, founded the De Pere architectural and engineering firm in 1995 with a mission to thoroughly understand clients' needs before taking on any project.

SPECIAL SECTION

Spotlight on Insight Innovation Award winners



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SUSTAINABILITY

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FOLLOWS FUNCTION

De Pere-based architectural firm Performa builds relationships before structures

Everything in moderation

Simple concepts grow the clean energy sector in Wisconsin



A section of a new turbine tower departing Broadwind Energy's Manitowoc production facility.

COURTESY OF TOBE RESCH VIA FLICKR.COM

Growing a clean energy sector doesn't have to be so hard. The national debate tends to rage around wind farms vs. fired power plants and massive solar arrays vs. drilling and fracking for oil deposits. Meanwhile, Wisconsin has been quietly growing its clean energy sector, employing a couple of tried and true concepts: efficiency and conservation.

Nearly 25,000 jobs are attributed to Wisconsin's clean energy sector, according to the recently released Clean Energy Midwest jobs survey conducted by a consortium of industry advocates, with more than 70 percent of those jobs attributed to energy efficiency. Another

1,000 clean energy jobs are expected to be added in 2016.

For energybank, Inc. founder and CEO Neal Verfuert, there's plenty of opportunity to grow those numbers.



"Our industry is just getting started," says Verfuert, whose company specializes in LED lighting systems that can more efficiently deliver light while

using as much as 80 percent less energy. "It's more than just lighting. As the economy moves toward the Internet of Things, we are talking about a growth potential of trillions (of dollars)."

The state certainly has plenty of room for growth. In addition to finding that most of the state's clean energy jobs are tied to efficiency, the Clean Jobs Midwest survey also found that Wisconsin has one of the Midwest's smallest clean energy workforces in the region.

Interestingly enough, the New North region is home to nearly 20 percent of those jobs, with many of the jobs being created by small firms with fewer than 25 employees. For example, energybank employs 15 at its Manitowoc facility.

Of the jobs tied to Wisconsin's clean energy sector, nearly 4,800 of them are found in the 18 counties that make up the New North region of the state. More than 3,400 of those are classified in the energy efficiency category.

The energy generation sector represents just under 1,100 jobs in

"Everybody is looking to be more efficient. A lot of those initial investments are nearing the end of the life cycle and its time for the next generation, which is even more efficient."

—Neal Verfuert, energybank founder and CEO

companies such as Broadwind Energy, which manufactures wind turbine towers at its facilities in Manitowoc and Texas. The company sold 450 wind

towers in 2015 and in the first quarter of this year sold another 119 towers, Broadwind interim CEO Stephanie Kushner said on a recent investor conference call. The company also plans to introduce a new type of tower this year.

The region's growing bioenergy sector also received a hat tip in the recent survey.

What the job numbers do not necessarily reflect is the work of regional manufacturers who fabricate components, controls and equipment with applications in multiple segments of the energy industry.

Verfuert says efficiency and conservation are likely to lead the way for some time.

"Everybody is looking to be more efficient," he says. "A lot of those initial investments are nearing the end of the life cycle and it's time for the next generation, which is even more efficient."

As companies integrate [continued] »



COURTESY ENERGYBANK

Lakeside Plastics recently installed an LED lighting system in its warehouse to improve efficiency and conserve energy. Energy efficiency is the largest segment of the clean energy industry in Wisconsin.

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ENERGY/SUSTAINABILITY

new LED lighting systems like the ones designed and manufactured by energybank, energy use shifts to an “as-needed” model as the systems reduce light (and the related energy) from areas where work is not taking place, while also eliminating the surge created when systems are switched on after being shut off completely.

It's certainly top of mind for those



COURTESY ENERGYBANK

Gandrud Automotive recently integrated LED lighting into its car lots. Auto dealers are a growing segment for energy efficient lighting installation created by energybank, Inc.



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who design and construct the plants and work spaces that house the region's manufacturers and service industries.

“No one would even think of installing something that wasn't efficient,” says Mark Hanson, director of sustainable services for Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction.

“Sustainability and efficiency are part of the everyday thought process now.”

That thought process is reflected in every aspect of building design, from the routine selection of boilers or windows to advanced options such as the installation of local solar arrays and on-site wind towers, Hanson says.

Indeed, local solar arrays have been a growing trend, one that could rapidly increase as improvements in battery technology allow surplus energy to be stored on site rather than sold back to the grid.

As the on-site installations become more prevalent, they can reduce peak demand on utilities, negating the need for additional plants and extending the life of traditional power sources.

Solar installations have been helped by the entry into the marketplace of third-party financing organizations that have made it easier for companies to adopt on-site arrays to generate power, Hanson says.

The upfront financing costs have been a barrier in the past.

“We will do better as we develop additional abilities and confidence,” Hanson says. “It's a constant effort to infuse that knowledge into all levels of what we do.” ①