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President Container 'Goes Solar' In NY

by Len Prazych

Moonachie, New Jersey based President Container Group (PCG) went "live" over Labor Day weekend, when it flipped the switch on a new 2-megawatt ground-mounted solar farm at its Middletown, New York, super plant. In doing so, the independent and privately held PCG became owners of the largest privately owned solar farm in the state of New York. The "farm" occupies 11-acres of PCG's 24-acre parcel approximately 60 miles north of New York City. Now that the project is complete and fully operational, it will be able to provide 25 percent of the energy needed to power the equipment and support operations in PCG's 522,000-square-foot plant each year.

A total of 19,020 solar panels will enable President Container Group to save 25 percent annually on the electricity required to power its 522,000-square-foot super plant.

"The process was flawless," said Richard Goldberg, PCG's Vice President of Operations, who was involved in the process from inception to completion. "It involved good communication, which was key for a project of this size, and the coordinated efforts from many key players. We fired up for approximately seven hours a day for the first few very sunny days of September and ran the plant with 100 percent clean and renewable solar energy."

PCG's facility will become the first industrial scale solar project in Orange County fully qualified under the New York State Energy & Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) NY-Sun Incentive Program, which helps reduce the costs of installing solar electric systems across New York State. In addition to NYSERDA, the other key players involved in making PCG's "green initiative" a reality included Orange & Rockland Utilities, PCG's electricity provider; the Town of Wallkill; the Orange County Industrial Development Agency (IDA); Orange County Trust, which provided financing for the project; GEM Energy, the project's contractor; and General Electric (GE), which supplied the solar panels, inverters, related equipment and engineering.

"Our company is growing and our electricity costs were rising by about five percent a year as we expanded," said Larry Grossbard, co-General Manager of PCG at the solar farm's groundbreaking ceremony in May. "Working with GE, we saw an opportunity to take control of our energy future in a way that was both economic and sustainable. The GE team worked with us

through every part of the process, from the incentive applications and zoning approvals, to the equipment and site engineering, all the way to installation. We're excited to become a leader in the solar space."

PCG's co-General Managers Larry Grossbard, right, and his brother Richard Grossbard, discussing their company's solar farm at a groundbreaking ceremony on May 29 in Middletown, New York.

As part of its agreement, GE provided PCG a solar solution consisting of equipment, site engineering, construction and installation, commissioning, spare parts, and operations and maintenance support for seven years. The GE team also supported PCG during its application process with NYSERDA, through local zoning and permitting approvals with the town of Wallkill, New York, and throughout the utility interconnection and groundwater studies.

One of 951 'tables,' each holding 20 2-foot by 4-foot solar panels.

"This deal marks the first example where GE is offering a fully integrated approach in the solar space," said Erik Schiemann, General Manager of GE's solar product line. "By acting as both a developer and equipment solution provider, we're making it easier for commercial and industrial companies like President Container Group to invest in solar power."

A History Of Sustainability

Being environmentally aware is nothing new to PCG. It was, in fact, sustainable before sustainability became an industry buzzword. Back in 1988, when protecting the environment was often overlooked by the corrugated industry, PCG invested in a natural gas co-generation unit in its Moonachie, New Jersey, headquarters. The company learned then that in addition to providing long-term benefits to the environment, the initiative saved energy and money.

Fast forward nearly three decades later. As the cost of electricity and doing business continues to rise, the investment in solar energy will enable PCG to cap its energy costs, which will allow the company to remain competitive as it executes the long-term growth plan for its super plant in Middletown, New York.

"We want to show our customers and the community that we are not only doing the right thing for the environment but that we will be here for the long haul," said Richard Grossbard. "When our customers visit our plant, they are in awe of our solar farm and realize the magnitude of our commitment to sustainable energy. They can see for themselves that we are one of the 'greenest' corrugated manufacturers in North America and this only solidifies our position."

PCG's co-founder Marvin Grossbard, right, with New York State Senator Bill Larkin at the May groundbreaking of PCG's solar farm.

PCG worked closely with NYSERDA on its solar farm initiative, continuing the relationship with the state agency that had been the company's energy efficiency partner since 2010, when it first began creating its super plant in New York. The agency worked with PCG on its factory lighting, production machinery, HVAC systems, air compressors and most recently, it robotic palletization system.

PCG has lauded technology brought to bear by GE, which provides its customers with a broad array of power generation, energy delivery and water process technologies to solve their challenges. While GE provided PCG the latest in solar panel technology, the

company works in all areas of the energy industry, including renewable resources such as wind and solar; biogas and alternative fuels; and coal, oil, natural gas and nuclear energy.

Richard Goldberg

The Power Of the Sun

Construction on the solar farm began in March of this year, when final permits were granted and the first solar panels were installed on the land adjacent to PCG's plant. By September, 951 tables, each comprised of 20 2-foot by 4-foot solar panels were installed, for a total of 19,020 individual solar panels that on a bright and sunny day can power PCG's entire plant, including its Fosber Corrugator and plethora of finishing equipment. And while cost savings are realized when the power of the sun is delivering maximum energy, usually around noon on a generally bright and cloudless day, the panels do not store energy.

"It's a dance between our electricity provider and our solar farm," said PCG's Goldberg. "If it's a sunny day, our use of solar energy goes up and the electricity we need from our provider goes down. If our solar energy is down because it's a cloudy or rainy day, we use more of the utility's electricity.

"Using solar energy is very 'clean,' meaning our motors, drives and other electronic components, even with our existing energy managing capacitance, will see longer lives, and less breakdowns. The system will bring many benefits to our facility now and for decades to come."