

Solar array to save Muskingum University on utility costs

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Muskingum University builds solar array: With one solar project under way, Muskingum University is looking at two or three more small projects that could lead to saving thousands of dollars in utility costs in the coming years.



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NEW CONCORD — With one solar project under way, Muskingum University is looking at two or three more small projects that could lead to saving thousands of dollars in utility costs in the coming years.

University Director of Facilities Kevin Wagner said a 75-kilowatt, 297-panel system is being constructed on the Rec Center roof by

South Zanesville

Third Sun Solar of Athens. The system will generate power for the building and save about \$15,000 annually in electricity costs.

Materials for the the \$290,000 project, paid for through university capital improvements funds, were staged on the roof top in late December, but then winter weather delayed the project.

Installation began Monday and was partially completed by Tuesday. Because of the snowy weather today, work is expected to pick up

again Thursday. Hanna Electric Service, of New Concord, already has run wire through a conduit to tie the array into the Rec Center's transformer.



The track system for the panels isn't bolted into the roof surface, but is held down with concrete pavers supplied by OK Coal and Concrete of South Zanesville.

Michael Pleasant, filed manager of Third Sun Solar in Athens, works to install solar panels on top of the Rec Center at Muskingum University. The 297 panels will give power to the Rec Center and save the University \$15,000 a year.

"We cut down on the number of roof penetrations that way. You just put a new roof in, you don't want a bunch of holes in your roof," he said. "We worked with the engineer to design a simple, noninvasive way of doing this."



Michael Pleasant, filed manager of Third Sun Solar in Athens, works to install solar panels on top of the Rec Center at Muskingum University. The 297 panels will give power to the Rec Center and save the University \$15,000 per year. / Trevor Jones/Times Recorder

Wagner said the idea for the project came up through discussions with Board of Trustees member Tom McCalmont, a Muskingum graduate who owns solar firm McCalmont Engineering in California.

After discussions with University President Dr. Anne Steele, the university first considered building a six-acre, ground-level system at the softball field. Panels also would have been placed on carports in the area.

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Those plans first were pitched to the New Concord Planning Commission in December 2011 but were tabled because of concerns about zoning requirements and the effect on the surrounding neighborhood.

“It just wasn’t going to be a good fit for the village, so we started identifying other areas, and the Rec Center was the first one we decided to start with,” Wagner said. “It’s kind of tough because we don’t have many flat roofs on campus. The only drawback is that no one can see it up here, like we would have had out at the softball field.”

The Palmer Art Gallery is next in line for a solar array, and the campus library building, which is slated to undergo renovations including a new roof, could follow, Wagner said. That project could start in November with board approval.

“We’re also considering Thomas Hall but it’s still early in planning. It’s just identified as a possible location at this point,” he said.

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