

Sunshine State Gets First Solar-powered Net-zero Energy Bank

By Nancy Birnbaum © 2011

TD Bank opened its first net-zero energy bank location in the U.S., in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The branch, located on Cypress Creek Road, just east of I95 held its grand opening celebration with a carnival-like atmosphere including contests and prizes, a live DJ, games and refreshments. I was on hand for the grand opening celebration which I had been anticipating since noticing the erection of the huge solar



array just behind the building. The party was in honor of this major achievement for TD Bank, their first net-zero energy building (NZE).

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) defines a net-zero energy building as a residential or commercial building that produces at least as much renewable power in a year as it uses. Only eight buildings in the nation are registered as NZEBs with the DOE, and TD Bank's Fort Lauderdale store will be the first net-zero energy commercial bank.

According to Jacquelynn Henke, a Vice President and the Green Strategy Officer for TD Bank, "Opening a TD Bank that is energy efficient with solar panels that produce 100 percent of the store's energy needs is a win for us, but most of all it's a win for the environment. Building this store in the Sunshine State made absolute sense.

"At TD Bank, we want to be a responsible community partner and that includes a commitment to being an environmental leader," said Kevin Gillen, Florida Regional President. "In one year, we have achieved carbon-neutrality throughout our entire footprint and have opened more than 20 environmentally-friendly stores and offices. We are thrilled to open the first net-zero energy commercial bank location in the United States."

The dramatic rise in energy costs from non-renewable sources has made alternative energy sources such as solar an intriguing option for both business and residential customers.

The new TD Bank store will require approximately 97,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity a year to operate, but its large array of 400 solar panels will produce a minimum of 100,000 kWh a year on site. This means that the new solar array will produce more energy than the store will use – enough renewable energy in a year to power approximately nine average U.S. homes. FP&L will have to credit TD Bank for any power they create but do not use. Another benefit is that the solar array will prevent CO2 emissions roughly equivalent to removing 11 cars from America's highways.

I've been a proponent of Alternative energy, and specifically Solar Energy since living in the alternative-progressive state of California where going solar is not just a dream.

Florida Falls Behind

When the 2006 Florida Legislature, at the behest of Governor Charlie Crist, was tasked with increasing renewable energy use, it created the Florida Energy Act. In addition to putting money aside for grants and rebates related to renewable energy, the act also provided for offering state tax money to offset energy costs by providing a credit to power companies using renewable energy.



Then on June 30, 2010, four separate Florida incentives for renewable energy expired: the Solar Energy Incentives Program, the Renewable Energy Production Tax Credit, the Renewable Energy Technologies Investment Tax Credit, and the Renewable Energy Equipment Sales Tax Exemption.

The solar rebate program has been out of funding for months and will finally officially close, as was not reauthorized by the Florida Legislature. There are currently no incentive plans in place for Florida Residents or Businesses to encourage them to do what TD Bank has done – to invest in solar.

Other states like California are forging ahead in this crucial race. Of course, California is always in the forefront when it comes to alternatives – alternative lifestyles, alternative music, alternative energy – you name it, they've done it.

Back in 2006, the California Public Utilities Commission approved the California Solar Initiative (CSI), a comprehensive \$2.8 billion program that provides incentives toward solar development over 11 years. The California Solar Initiative which went into effect in January of 2007, currently provides a rebate for renewable energy users with an immediate return on their investment. California hopes to generate a third of its power from clean sources by 2020.



Federal Renewables Incentives

According to Henke, TD Bank took advantage of renewable energy incentives offered by FP&L, which has invested heavily in solar energy over the past few years. Shareholders, employees as well as customers of the Canadian-based company have made it clear that they approve of the Bank's status as the first Carbon Neutral Organization in North America and the fact that TD Bank continues to push the envelope to improve on their commitment to the environment.

Other monies are available from the Fed. And Florida now receives Federal Grant money to promote the growth of renewables like solar power in commercial and industrial sectors. One grant, the United States Department of Treasury Renewable Energy Grant, is equal to 30 percent of the cost of the solar powering equipment.

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