

RET CENTER WINDSOR: RENEWABLE ENERGY AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

TEACHING THE PUBLIC THE PERKS OF GREEN ENERGY

FOR A GLIMPSE OF the future, you need only take a few steps inside Windsor's Renewable Energy Technology Center. To understand why the center is there, and why it is needed, takes only a refresher on the opportunities of renewable energy. The greenhouse effect, climate change and the increasing limitations of fossil fuel usage are some of the driving factors for a much-needed turn towards green energy.

"We established the center as a learning and education center for the community," explains Robin Easterbrook, executive director of the RET Center. The center opened in August 2009, and in a sign of the times, converted a 3,300-square-foot shuttered part of the old tool and die manufacturing facility in central Windsor, to showcase the best in renewable technologies – with a focus on solar technologies. Green Sun Rising Inc. and scn energy America Inc., joined forces, and within a matter of months, developed the center from a simple warehouse showroom displaying publicly and commercially available solar products, to a community-based institute for understanding sustainability and renewable energy.

The open-door policy at the RET Center means anyone who stops in can learn how solar photovoltaic (PV) technology works; simply put, how the power of the sun can be used to power a home or business. It's a hands-on learning experience. All the necessary hardware and components for setting up solar PV systems are onsite, provided by scn energy America, a division of scn Energy, one of Europe's leading providers of PV solar solutions.

The center is in the progress of installing a solar PV demonstration system, so the public can see a functioning solar power system up close. Visitors also learn how the Ontario Government's recently enacted Green Energy Act and its Feed-In Tariff (FIT) program allows anyone in Ontario to become their

own private power company. By setting up a solar PV system, the average homeowner can sell electricity to the Ontario Power Grid at a profit.

Shining a Light on Solar Thermal

The RET Center also showcases the highly effective power of solar thermal technology. The center's second partner company, Green Sun Rising Inc., has installed a solar thermal system with roof-mounted solar collectors. Green Sun Rising sells the technology that utilizes the power of the sun to heat water that can then be used directly, or for heating or for industrial processes that require heat or hot water. A solar thermal system can also be used for cooling purposes in combination with absorption cooling.

Behind these technologies sits a team of highly educated and motivated employees from both partner companies. From a newly developed 1,500-square-foot administrative office, the team designs systems to suit clients' needs. The attached classroom facilities provide a place for the center to further carry out its mission of educating the public about renewable energy technologies.

Classes range from a basic seminar on green technology to a targeted workshop for those looking to install a solar photovoltaic system. Coming courses will teach installation of solar thermal systems as well as how to apply for grants under the Ontario Feed-In Tariff program.

All courses are developed by the RET Center's executive director. Robin Easterbrook's background in finance, procurement and strategy translates into a unique understanding of the demands of the private sector. A dozen years as a business instructor at the University of Windsor affirm his desire to pass on that knowledge.





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Going Green by Staying Local

The latest expansion at the RET Center is a 2,700-square-foot manufacturing area. The mounts4Solar division manufactures the standardized and custom-designed mounting systems onsite for solar panels.

From the outset, both scn America and Green Sun Rising committed to localizing the production of as many of the components of their systems as possible. The Ontario Green Energy Act requires local content in all systems qualifying for the FIT and micro-FIT programs. With its local manufacturing center, the RET Center is ahead of the pack.

A Shared Vision Realized

The RET Center is the brainchild of Klaus Dohring, a dedicated entrepreneur and mechanical engineer with a background in the automotive sector. Dohring is a tireless proponent of not only renewable energy technologies, but sustainability for our world. “The data is clear,” says Dohring, “We cannot go on and continue depleting our planet’s natural resources at present rate – we must take action now! Europe is already far ahead in implementing technology and moving towards a more sustainable environment,” says the German-born Dohring.

“It is a privilege to work with someone like Klaus,” says Robin Easterbrook, himself a former automotive manager. “He has such a strong vision and such a strong commitment to that vision. It is one I very much share with him, myself.”

For more information about the Renewable Energy Technology Center, its programs and links to the center’s associated companies, visit www.RET-Center.com. ●