

Green jobs begin to sprout in Windsor and Essex County

Thousands line up for work in renewable energy industry

BY ELLEN VAN WAGENINGEN, THE WINDSOR STAR MARCH 30, 2011

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Construction crews continue to work on the large solar farm outside of Amherstburg on Tuesday, March 22, 2011.

Photograph by: Tyler Brownbridge, The Windsor Star

WINDSOR, Ont. -- Windsor's summer forecast is for job creation in the wind and solar industries to ramp up rapidly.

Two previously announced factories -a solar panel maker and a wind tower manufacturer -are to go into production and a German photovoltaic module maker is expected to open its doors by the end of the summer.

The German company is making preparations to open a factory in Windsor, but no details have yet been announced, said Klaus Dohring, a Windsor solar company owner who has been helping recruit experienced manufacturers to come to the region.

In the past year, there have been plans announced for wind and solar manufacturing that could bring over 1,000 new jobs to the region. So far, about 300 of those jobs have materialized.

Spanish-owned solar panel maker Siliken has retrofitted a former mould shop in an industrial park north of Windsor Airport. It is in the process of hiring and expects to start production in April.

It has hired 10 mid-management employees and will be interviewing for 30 labour jobs over the next three weeks, said Paco Caudet, general manager of Siliken Canada.

Production will start with two lines and gradually increase to three shifts, with two more lines to be added later, he said. "Altogether, in the whole plant, we're going to have about 200 people working there.... By October probably."

Already, the first month's production has been spoken for as solar developers scramble to meet higher Ontariocontent requirements that kicked in at the beginning of this year, Caudet said. Solar power generation projects that want to sell to the Ontario grid at subsidized prices must have at least 60 per

cent domestic content.

The requirement for wind projects is 25 per cent, but it jumps to 50 per cent in 2012.

Wind tower manufacturer CS Wind is in the midst of refurbishing and moving equipment into the former Valiant Corporation plant in the Twin Oaks Industrial Park, said Rakesh Naidu, director of business attraction for the WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation.

It is aiming to begin production by August but hasn't started hiring locally yet.

WEEDC will be assisting the South Korean company to hire unemployed and underemployed area residents who are enrolled with Employment Ontario and the city-run social assistance program, Naidu said. Most will be trained on the job.

The plant is expected to require 300 workers when it is in full production, making it the biggest renewable energy manufacturer in the region.

Another major project, a thin-film solar module plant slated for Windsor Airport lands, is currently on hold. Ontario-based Solar Source Corporation and its Indian partner, HHV, were among the first to announce they planned to open a large-scale factory in the region that would employ about 150 people.

The project, which would include the city spending \$4 million to construct a building the manufacturer would rent, is in a "holding pattern," said Ross Beatty, president and CEO of Solar Source. He couldn't indicate when the plan might move forward, but said the company still wants to invest in Windsor for the long-term.

Naidu said Solar Source has applied to a provincial funding program and is awaiting word before it goes further.

The thirst for jobs in renewable energy manufacturing was evident when 3,000 people lined up to apply for 50 jobs at a locally owned solar panel manufacturer in Tecumseh earlier this month. Unconquered Sun Solar Technologies Inc., which currently has 11 employees, plans to hire 25 more by the end of April, said CEO Sean Moore, a former autoworker. If demand is strong, it will hire another 25 in July, he said.

Siliken's Caudet said he has also been overwhelmed by job applications that came pouring in shortly after the plant was announced in October.

"It all depends on the market now," said Ryan Kelly, general manager of Schletter Canada Inc. The German company that makes aluminum mounting systems for solar panels quietly opened the doors of its Windsor plant near Devonshire Mall a year ago. It currently has 12 employees and will hire up to as many as 125 as business picks up.

"There are a lot of really qualified people out there," Kelly said of the flood of applications he's received.

The pay scale for wind and solar manufacturing jobs ranges from \$10-\$12 an hour for general labourers to \$25 an hour for skilled trades and engineering positions, said the development corporation's Naidu.



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