

Promising Practices



Institutions

Sunnyville skilled grads ready for employment in solar industry

Partners in Skills Development for the Green Economy (dubbed Sunnyville) is a collaboration comprised of the Employment & Education Centre (EEC), St. Lawrence College (Brockville Campus), and Joe Jordan of UC Solar Limited. This collaboration is working together to further the development of solar generation programs and provide trained and skilled labour for this emerging sector of the Ontario economy.

More specifically, Sunnyville is providing skills training to people within the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, in order to meet the needs of Eastern Ontario employers in the solar photovoltaic area of the renewable energy sector. St. Lawrence College has developed curriculum in conjunction with Joe Jordan to equip eligible participants with the installation and manufacturing skills necessary to fill the ever growing demands of this sector.

The Sunnyville program consists of college level intensive solar Photo Voltaic Installer certification involving 18 weeks of in-class theory with some practical, hands-on work. This is occurring at St. Lawrence College's Brockville Campus. Upon completion of this curriculum, employment opportunities will be available to the participants with employers in this sector.

Employment Opportunities and Employer Stipends

Employment opportunities available to Sunnyville participants will put the theoretical information that the participants have gained over their 18 weeks of curriculum into practical use. These opportunities encompass an employee-employer relationship.

Employers receive a stipend as a contribution towards the costs of the on-the-job training that will occur.

The vision is that employers in this sector will have a fully trained skilled labour force specific to the renewable energy sector.

Graduation and joining the emerging clean energy economy

At its May 2011 Convocation ceremony, the Brockville campus of St. Lawrence College had 24 individuals graduate with a Solar Photovoltaic System Installer certificate.

Sue Watts, the Manager of Special Projects at the EEC, said the graduates have achieved "an overall employment rate of 71%, with 46% employed in the solar industry. The employment opportunities that we have found for our graduates include Project Management, Installation, Sales, Supervisors of Installation Crews and Self Employment."¹

The training would have been helpful for two large solar panel installations that were to have occurred in the Leeds and Grenville area, but those big projects did not end up proceeding as quickly as originally thought, Watts said. The two large projects may still proceed but, the EEC had to adapt quickly. "We had to switch to finding employment opportunities by contacting over 100 employers in the [renewable energy] sector around Eastern Ontario," Watts said.

Ontario Trillium Foundation and next steps

On March 4, 2010, the Ontario Trillium Foundation board of directors decided it would fund the Sunnyville program to the tune of \$503,000 over three years, as

one of its Future Fund grants, “to further the development of solar generation programs and provide skills training in Leeds Grenville to meet the needs of Eastern Ontario employers in the photovoltaic area of the green economy.”²

Glenna Schaillee, a Special Programs officer at St. Lawrence College, said in order for applicants to get into the program presently, they must apply through the EEC.³

Schaillee said St. Lawrence College will be offering the program again in January 2012. In early Oct. 2011, Watts said they are currently prescreening candidates for the January program, but she expects it will be fully subscribed.

In the coming years, the college is considering potentially offering the course up to the wider public, because Schaillee suspects there is interest out there.

With the recent re-election of the Ontario government, the Green Energy and Green Economy Act and the related feed-in-tariff program should survive. And, if Ontario’s emerging clean energy economy continues to expand, there may indeed be hundreds if not thousands of people interested in taking the certification course; and jobs could be waiting for them when they graduate. If so, the Sunnyville collaboration may be a good model for others to consider emulating.

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References:

- ¹ Watts S. Coordinator of Special Projects, Employment & Education Centre. E-mail communication. 3 Oct. 2011.
- ² Ontario Trillium Foundation. “The Future Fund: 2009-2020.” Website text. www.otf.ca/en/grantRecipients/ff_2009_2010.asp. Accessed October 2011.
- ³ Schaillee G. Special Programs Officer, St. Lawrence College. Telephone interview. 5 Oct. 2011.

