

ENERGY

'Tip of the iceberg,' new vice-president says

ALLAN BENNER
Tribune Staff

WELLAND — "This is the money maker," Moses Bilagot said, gesturing to two large inverters on the second floor of the new River Road Recreation Centre.

It's those two fridge-sized devices that convert the sun's light collected by the solar panels into the energy sold into the electrical grid, added Bilagot, OSM Solar's new vice-president.

The solar system produces enough electricity to power about 50 homes, and is expected to generate about \$230,000 a year in additional revenue for the sports complex project — more than enough than is needed to make the project financially viable, without the need for additional tax revenue, Bilagot said.

"It will pay for the whole building, no problem," he said, adding it's become the envy of other municipalities across the province.

"Officials from other cities have been closely monitoring the project. Some have been doing drivebys to see the progress."

But Bilagot said the new company on Hansler Rd. has a lot more ideas it plans to role out that will be just as beneficial for

OSM SOLAR

■ OSM Solar was established in February, 2011.

■ The River Road Recreation Centre has 1,160-locally-manufactured solar panels on its roof.

■ The cost of the project was about \$1.2 million.

■ It's expected to bring in about \$230,000 in revenue a year for the next 20 years.

the city.

"This is just the tip of the iceberg."

Bilagot, a professor from the University of Western Ontario's research park, said he was recruited by OSM president John Gamble to put together a team of experts to further develop plans for the company, such as Howard Elliott, who has been working as a consultant on the sports complex project.

Working with those experts, Bilagot hopes to start manufacturing new renewable energy technology at the local plant.

He said he holds 45 patents for technology, including a new battery storage system for the electricity generated by renewable energy projects, whether they're

solar or wind-powered.

Another device promises to make the installation of solar panels quicker and easier. Doing so, he added, will also reduce the overall cost of solar power projects.

"At the OSM factory, we want to produce cheaper quicker installation of systems so it's good for the customer."

Bilagot said his brother Jasja Bilagot is also part of the team, bringing a few ideas of his own to the table.

"He's another inventor like Howard and I," he said.

And locally, he said it will mean the expansion of the current company — and more jobs for the local community.

"If we make the storage system, someone has to produce the storage system and that means more jobs at OSM," he said. "And we're using Canadian innovation for a change. We're just local yokels."

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GOT AN
IDEA?

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ALLAN BENNER

Electrical consultant Howard Elliott and OSM Solar vice-president Moses Bilagot stand beside electrical inverters to be used to transform the sun's rays into \$230,000 in annual income for the River Rd. recreation centre.

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■ SOLAR POWER



ALLAN BENNER Staff Photo

Work is underway to install 1,160 solar panels on the south-facing roof of the Welland sports complex under construction on River Rd.

Green energy brought company to Welland

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The solar array on the sports complex roof was included in developer Sportstar Capital's design when first proposed in April 2010, in the hope of generating and selling enough power to make the project financially viable without having an impact on city taxes.

The 1,160 panels will produce

“This community is way ahead of anybody else as far as solar is concerned.”

John Gamble

about 250 kilowatts of electricity — enough to power about 70 homes.

The \$15.8-million sports facility is scheduled for completion by November.

Gamble said Welland was ahead of the rest of the province when it applied for an Ontario Power Authority Feed-in-Tariff contract for the solar panels a few years ago. Since then, he

said, the province has changed the rules of the FIT program with a new focus on community participation in solar projects.

Gamble said it was the municipality's interest in green energy that inspired OSM Solar to move to Welland to begin with — enthusiasm was expressed by economic development officer Dan Degazio, city manager Craig Stirtzinger, former

mayor Damian Goulbourne and others.

“When I decided to build this company, I came here because of Welland being advanced in wanting to bring in green energy,” he said.

“This community is way ahead of anybody else as far as solar is concerned.”

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■ OBITUARIES

John Lamacraft, 77, Saturday, August 2
Joyce Lee Norén, 87, Wednesday, August 7
Eleanor Ritchie, 87, Tuesday, August 27
* For details see C1

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