

New Jersey Herald

Vernon BOE announces completion of solar project

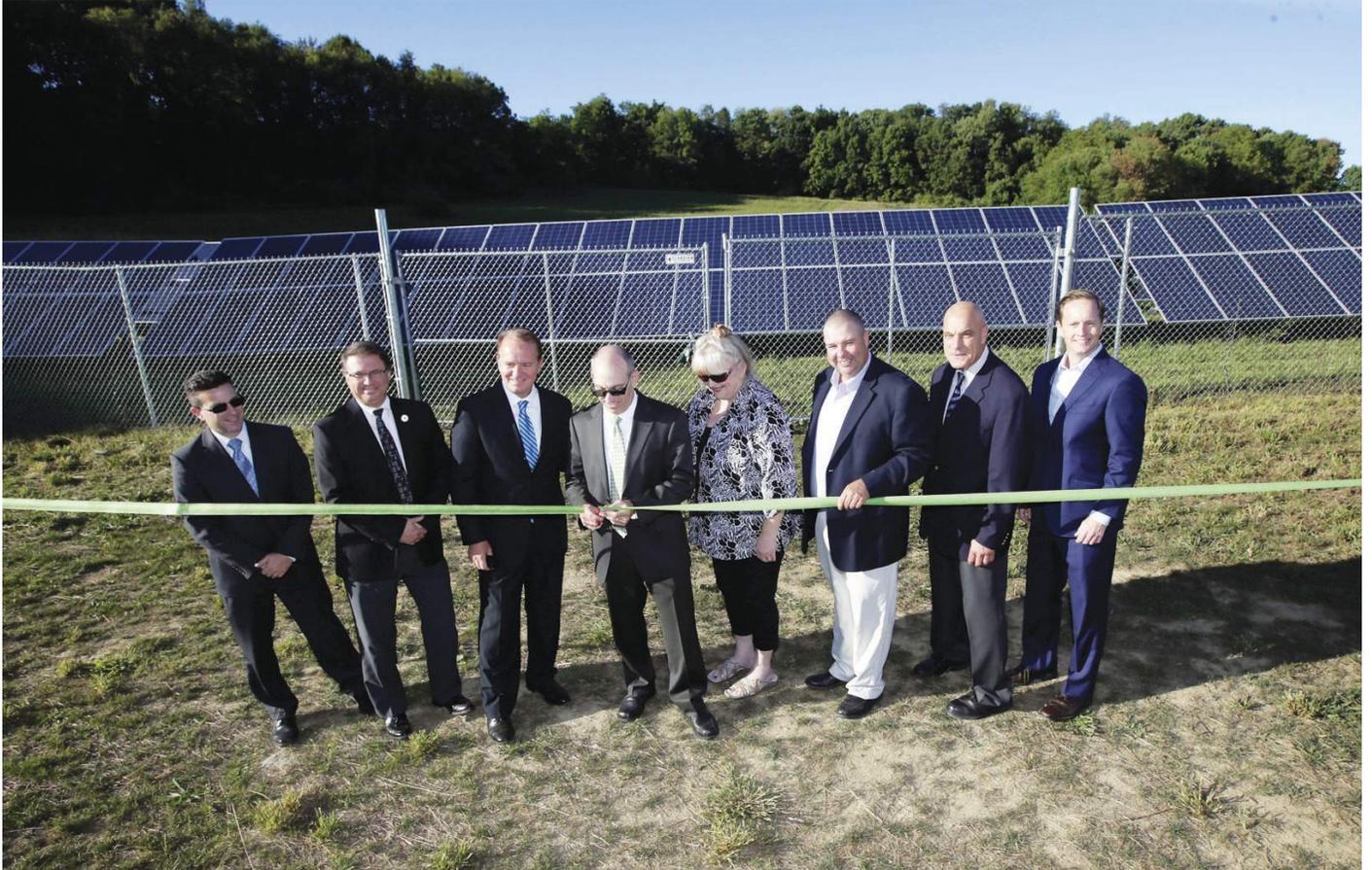


Photo by Daniel Freel/New Jersey Herald Construction on a solar farm to provide power to the Lounsberry Hollow Middle School and the Rolling Hills Primary School in Vernon was recently completed. Members of the Vernon Township Board of Education and representatives of SolarCity cut the ribbon to celebrate on Thursday. From left: board attorney Ryan Scerbo; Mark Warner, vice president of Gabel Associates; Charles McKay, Vernon Schools assistant superintendent; Steve Kepnes, school business administrator; Cindi Auberger, board member; Brad Sparta, board vice president; Art DiBenedetto, superintendent; and Nick Walsh, SolarCity project development manager.

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By Eric Obernauer New Jersey Herald

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VERNON -- The Vernon Township Board of Education has announced the completion of an 856-kilowatt ground-mounted solar array behind Lounsberry Hollow Middle School.

The project, which began operating earlier this month, will provide electricity to both Lounsberry Hollow Middle School and Rolling Hills Primary School over the next 15 years.

School officials have said the project, which is not part of the Sussex County solar initiative, not only will enable the district to achieve significant energy cost savings but will also ensure that its energy costs are stable and predictable for the foreseeable future. They also envision the project serving as an educational resource for students.

Under the terms of a 15-year contract, Solar City -- which oversaw the financing and installation of the project -- will be responsible for the monitoring and maintenance of the project over the life of the contract.

According to school officials, this approach allowed for the project to be installed without the need for any upfront capital investment by the school district and also will ensure that the system is professionally maintained and operated.

Both Lounsberry Hollow School, which serves grades 5-6, and Rolling Hills Primary School, which serves grades 2-4, will be 100 percent powered by the system on a net annual basis.

By using the energy on its own property, the district anticipates savings in the range of \$29,000 in the first year and an estimated nominal savings of more than \$348,000 over the 15-year term of the agreement.

The system will earn Solar Renewal Energy Credits, or SRECs, which the state government requires electrical suppliers to purchase from producers of solar power in order to meet their state-mandated quotas for renewable energy. The cost of doing so, which gets passed on to ratepayers, facilitates a flow of monies to solar producers that, in Vernon's case, will make it possible for the district to save money.

For every 1,000 kilowatt-hours generated, solar energy producers are able to earn one SREC.

At the end of the 15-year term of the agreement, the school district will have the option of continuing to use the solar array, which school officials estimate could have a life span of up to 35 years.

The solar agreement is the result of a competitive procurement process initiated by the district's legal counsel, Ryan Scerbo, of the law firm of DeCotiis, FitzPatrick and Cole, with the advice of an energy consultant, Mark Warner of Gabel Associates.

The district received five proposals and ultimately, in November 2014, awarded the contract to Solar City.

Eric Obernauer can also be contacted on Twitter: @EricObernNJH or by phone at 973-383-1213.