

Laidlaw 'dead keen' about solar park

Rockwood company hopes Guelph will become the home of what it says would be Canada's first such park

By VIK KIRSCH
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Some Guelph councillors have keyed into the vision of a local proponent of alternative power to create a solar park that would provide a viable source of inexhaustible, pollution-free renewable energy.

Richard Mash, founder of Sunpark Energy Corp. of Rockwood, envisions the prospect of a sea of solar cells, which convert sunlight to electricity, arrayed across former landfill sites or abandoned industrial sites in a solar park that the company says would be the first in Canada.

That's caught the attention of Guelph Councillor Maggie Laidlaw, who said yesterday she's "dead keen" on the idea.

"It's certainly an interesting concept," Laidlaw said yesterday, stressing renewable energy is the wave of the future. "It's socially responsible. It's environmentally friendly. It's the way we've got to go."

At least one other Guelph councillor, Dan Moziar, has expressed interest in the concept, as officials at City Hall seek to set up a meeting with Mash and Sunpark to consider a site for a solar



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**COUNCILLOR MAGGIE LAIDLAW
ON PROPOSED SOLAR PARK**

park within city limits.

Laidlaw said Guelph has its share of appropriate sites for such a park, possibly including a portion of the former Eastview landfill site, and brownfields — former contaminated industrial sites, which are costly to rehabilitate.

"I can see brownfields (as appropriate), even toxic sites that cannot be rehabilitated," Laidlaw said, noting one

site immediately occurs to her.

"IMICO's the one that came to the top of my mind," Laidlaw said, referring to the derelict former ironworks foundry on Guelph's southeast side, which city council recently began considering turning into a recreation park.

Sunpark Energy Corp. recently issued a corporate "challenge" to businesses to help establish the solar park, providing donations in return for publicity surrounding the proposed park.

Mash has also asked the public to donate to the project, at a cost of \$25 for each solar cell needed.

He said such a facility would be the first in Canada, though they exist around the world, notably in Germany, Spain and Asia.

He wants to build a solar array producing at least 100 kilowatts of power to start, which would require 48,000 cells on roughly half an acre of land.

"To do that, we need a million dollars," Mash said, adding that would require about 100 corporate sponsors.

To date, the four-week-old project has garnered four such sponsors with another 10 expressing interest.

More than 600 individuals have so far pledged to sponsor individual cells, he added.

Electricity generated from the solar park would feed into Ontario's power grid to pay for the project, with any profit going to fund park expansion, Mash explained.

He's convinced the project is gathering momentum, in part because Canadians favour alternative energy sources in an era of rising gasoline prices, limited oil supplies and concern over global warming from greenhouse gases.

"I'm optimistic we can build from here," he said of a local solar park.

Currently, the bulk of Ontario's retail consumers are paying about 5.8 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity, a price critics say doesn't reflect its true cost. Mash is encouraged by Queen's Park's announcement in May that by October it will pay solar producers 42 cents per kilowatt hour to encourage the development of alternative-energy sources.

Mash's interest in solar energy is shared by Guelph-based FireFly Energy, where he is operations support manager. The power retailer recently placed solar cells on its roof to power its offices.

Making use of a brownfield as part of a solar park struck a chord with Coun. Dan Moziar:

"That would eliminate or certainly reduce the environmental cleanup issues," Moziar said.

Solar should be explored in place of some energy from traditional sources, such as hydro-electric, coal- or nuclear-fired plants, said Moziar, who is familiar with Ontario's energy situation as a past local hydro commission chair and former chair of a provincewide municipal power utility association.

"Solar power is a partial solution and should not be rejected," Moziar said, adding if it goes ahead, he'd like higher levels of government to research innovative ways to cut solar power costs.

While solar sources remain more expensive than conventional ones, "that does not mean you should stop research," he reasoned.

Further, Moziar said if the true costs of producing conventional electricity were included in what consumers pay, such as cleaning the pollution from coal-fired plants, "solar power would have an advantage."

Solar energy is not only unlimited, it's also pollution-free, he stressed.

"Should the (solar park) project go ahead? Yes," Moziar said.

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CLEANING UP

John Snow of Johnny Bark Tree Care in Hillsburgh cuts up a giant silver maple tree yesterday at Woodlawn Memorial Park. The tree was felled during the violent summer storm that swept across southern Ontario Wednesday and included a report of a tornado touchdown in the Morriston area.

DAVE CARTER, GUELPH MERCURY

She's advocating on behalf of patients

Guelph General's new co-ordinator of patient relations settling into her job

By FIONA ISAACSON
MERCURY STAFF

GUELPH

Karen Connors knows how to be patient. She credits her parents, who always taught her to take the time to listen before you jump to conclusions.

It's a skill you have to work on continuously, she said.

An ear that's willing to listen is what patients should expect from Guelph General Hospital's new co-ordinator of patient relations.

It's a brand new position at the hospital. Connors, who started at the General July 24, recently left a similar position at Cambridge Memorial Hospital.

She said she's the objective person patients can come to if they have concerns, and speak openly and honestly.

If a staff member can deal with a concern on the spot, that's ideal, she said.

"People have been doing this type of work as part of their roles for a long, long time," she said.

But sometimes, patients may still feel they need to talk to someone else.

That's where Connors steps in.

She will act as a link between patient concerns and staff, ensuring that there's smooth communication.

She will also be tracking to see if there are any trends around patient care that the hospital should be concerned about.

It will be her job to ensure improvements are made to patient care.

Guelph General's chief executive, Richard Ernst, said the hospital wanted a consistent way to deal with patient concerns.

Having a patient advocate provides "a little objectivity" for patients, and allows the hospital to keep better track of any trends, he said.

Ernst said the hospital's 2004 accreditation, done by the Canadian Council on Health Services, highlighted the need for such a position.

While at the Cambridge hospital, Connors, who



Karen Connors, co-ordinator of patient relations at Guelph General Hospital, began her duties in July.

DAVE CARTER, GUELPH MERCURY

has a background in social work, helped with a variety of situations.

For instance, she's dealt with end-of-life care, where families felt they weren't getting the right treatment.

She was able to listen and speak to doctors to try and help the situation.

"My experience has been that when we're in these kinds of situations, often emotions can really run high. . . . people (staff) genuinely want to do what's best for the patient, but that doesn't mean we always see that the exactly same way," she said.

She's dealt with patients' concerns over wait times and injuries and helps them gain perspective

and educate them on how things work at the hospital.

At Guelph General, Connors wants to find ways of improving patient care and educate staff on what they can do better.

Because she is not part of any specific hospital 'team,' she can remain neutral, Connors said.

Right now Connors is scheduled to be at the hospital four days a week, but patients will be provided with information on how to contact her if she's not around.

Information will also be posted on the hospital's website: www.guelphgeneralhospital.com.

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Researchers studying horse fear

By THANA DHARMARAJAH
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GUELPH

It was at an Ancaster fair where Anna Kate Shoveller realized her thoroughbred didn't want to be reminded of his racing days.

The former race horse became skittish and lost his concentration during an English riding event after his ears picked up a horse racing call at the fairgrounds.

"I couldn't get his attention and when I tried to get his attention, he would get mad," Shoveller said.

The nervousness of a horse and how a rider influences the animal's fear is being studied by University of Guelph researchers.

The goal is to help reduce the number of riding injuries resulting from skittish horses.

The researchers plan to monitor the heart rates of both horses and their riders during the International Student Riding Nations' Cup in Innisfil Aug. 9 to 12.

"This could turn into a vicious cycle. . . . The rider fears the horse is nervous, the horse fears the rider is nervous," said Uta von Borstel, the PhD student who is leading the study.

Studies reveal about 25 per cent of all fatal sports injuries are related to horseback riding, and about a quarter of all horse-related injuries are due to the horse being scared, von Borstel said. She wants to figure out the temperament of certain riders and horses so that better matches can be made between the two.

She would also like to see additional training provided for riders to help them relax.

"A horse that is nervous is more likely spooked, causing an accident, so if we can reduce the overall nervousness, then we can reduce the likelihood of an accident," von Borstel said.

It's also been found that show jumping doesn't cause the most injuries. The same number of injuries occur in dressage riding, she said.

It's probably because dressage horses are bred to be highly sensitive to the riders' cues and show-jumping horses are more used to loud and noisy environments.

"If you're a good horse person you can usually get an indication of how your horse is doing," said Shoveller, who's been riding for nearly 25 years.

She said horses become more alert, skittish and startled when they're nervous.

It's exactly what happened to her thoroughbred, who had raced for seven years. Although she had taken him to a show-jumping competition at the fairgrounds that day, the minute he heard the racing call on the outside track, he got nervous.

From then on, Shoveller avoided fairs. "Horses are a dangerous business because we have an unknown," said Shoveller, who is organizing this year's International Student Riding Nations' Cup.

She said unlike a sport such as golf, where the possibility of an injury depends on the skill of the player, injuries from horseback riding don't necessarily depend on the skill of the rider or the horse but also the environment.

It's something that people should consider when putting new riders onto horses, or taking certain horses to new environments, Shoveller said.

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