

Solar is a sound investment

United Electric Power is generating its own power, pocketing the subsidies, and avoiding utility demand charges.

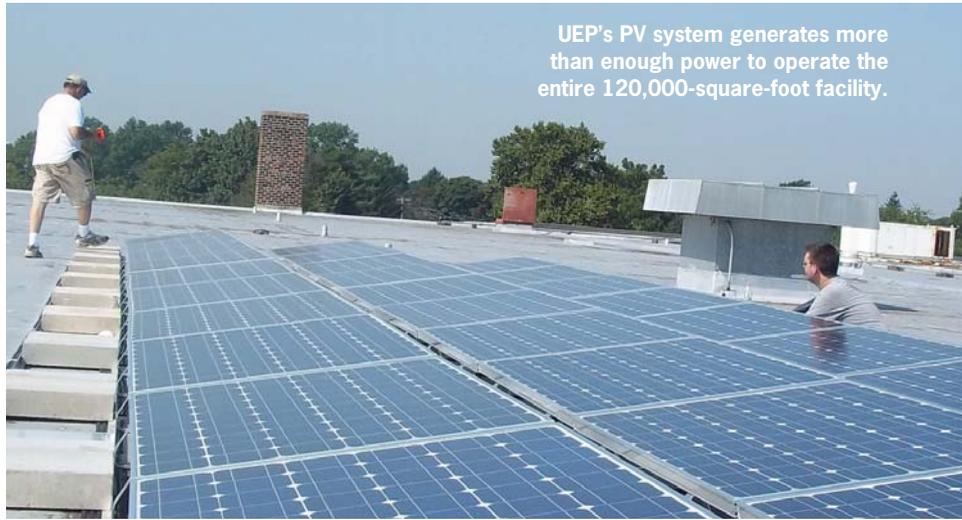
WHEN FACED WITH THE DECISION to install a 30kW photovoltaic system on its rooftop, United Electric Power (UEP) in Garden City Park, N.Y., simply couldn't resist the solar subsidies. "We have a rebate from the Long Island Power Authority [LIPA], the federal tax credit, and a state tax credit," said Jerry DiCunzolo, president and CEO. "Because of these subsidies, our payback will be less than five years. That's pretty significant."

Further explaining the installation, DiCunzolo continued, "Another issue—the main issue, really—is the peak demand charges we pay over and above the kilowatt hours that we actually use. Our demand charges were occasionally more than half of our bill."

Since UEP flipped the switch in November, at certain times of the day the system generates more than enough power to operate the corporate headquarters, counter, warehouse, supply division, commercial division, repair shop, and panel fabrication shop that occupy the 120,000-square-foot facility. According to UEP's net metering agreement, LIPA buys back this excess power.

For some electrical distributors, the installation of its own PV system has signaled its entry into the solar market. Not so for UEP. In fact, the very carrot that lured UEP into on-site power generation—subsidies—deters DiCunzolo from entering as a supplier: "The issue that I have as a business owner is this: The efficacy of solar is dependent on subsidies. Without the subsidies, there's a 12- to 15-year payback. If the subsidies go away, you have no business."

UEP is going gangbusters, though, on every other energy-efficiency technology. "Everybody wants to be more energy efficient," said DiCunzolo. We've been doing a lot of lighting projects; there's tremendous interest in LED lighting. We also do a lot with occupancy sensors; electric motors, variable-



UEP's PV system generates more than enough power to operate the entire 120,000-square-foot facility.

frequency drives, and pump applications are big as well. In some industrial environments, electric motors are responsible for 70% of the power consumed, which is more than lighting."

UEP's complete arsenal of energy-saving equipment and technologies was on display at its annual trade show, which was held Nov. 15.

"We bring in new vendors every year and expose our customers to new technology," said DiCunzolo. "We also did seminars and led customers on tours through our building." This "living laboratory" includes energy-efficiency solutions from room occupancy sensors, energy-efficient lighting, and LEDs to better insulation, improved zoning, and infrared heaters in employee-occupied areas.

And yes, UEP showed off its solar investment as well. "We took people up to the roof to see the solar panels," said DiCunzolo. "We all have to be more environmentally conscious. This system is a definite sales and marketing advantage."

—**JAN NIEHAUS** is an active member of numerous environmental and building industry organizations, and her commitment to green runs deep: Her St. Louis home is built with materials recycled from 1904 World's Fair buildings. Contact Niehaus at Jan@CommunicationByDesign.net or 314-644-4135.

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