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Perris solar project wins prestigious award for curbing pollution, greenhouse gases



Perris Assistant City Manager Ron Carr and Administrative Assistant II Tammy Bianco stand at the city's information booth during the recent convention of the League of California Cities. Perris was honored for installing solar panels at several city locations to curb greenhouse gases and reduce electricity consumption.

Perris' elected leaders set out to reduce their electrical consumption, bring more shade to city facilities, reduce pollution and fight global warming.

Their solution: Work with private industry to build and maintain five carports, each chock-full of solar panels on the roofs to generate power from an endlessly renewable source. The "Solar Shine Program," which kicked off in April 2006, is credited with cutting the city's electrical consumption 20 percent—enough to power 100 homes for a year and remove 960,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions annually. That's like taking 90 cars off the road.

For their efforts, the city took home the prestigious Helen Putnam Award from the League of California Cities. Perris was the only city in Riverside County to receive a Putnam award and one of only 14 in the state. The honors were announced Wednesday. (Sept. 24)

Mayor Daryl Busch led a contingent of city officials to the league's annual conference in Long Beach where Perris was honored for outstanding achievement among California's 478 cities. The Putnam award recognizes cities which have made "unique contributions to community residents and businesses, contributions which have resulted in lower costs or more effective delivery of services." Furthermore, the award aims to "recognize and promote the outstanding efforts and innovative solutions by city governments."

Perris took honors in the Planning and Environmental Planning category. Other cities were honored for innovations in housing, public safety and internal administration.

Mayor Busch said the award shows Perris is a state leader in the fight to reduce greenhouse gases.

"We're meeting our energy goals and protecting the environment by using renewable technology," Busch said.



Aerial views of Perris solar-panel carports which were honored this week at the League of California Cities.

Photo Courtesy of SPG Solar



Perris Councilman John Motte, Mayor Daryl Busch and councilmembers Al Landers and Mark Yarbrough worked with staff and private industry to bring the solar panel system to the city, saving taxpayers \$1.8 million over the next 20 years.

The city linked up with Honeywell on the solar project.

Working together, the public-private partnership built new carports and installed solar panels on their rooftops at five locations in Perris. Those include City Hall, the library, fire station, senior center and corporate yard. The new carports provided 240 spaces of shaded parking for city residents and staff. Honeywell engineers also installed energy-saving lights, high-efficiency heating and cooling units and programmable thermostats in several city buildings.

The savings to taxpayers runs nearly \$2 million over the 20-year agreement with Honeywell, enough to cover the costs of the upgrades.

Since the solar panels likely will last 40 or more years, cost savings should continue well into the mid-century.

Mayor pro-tem Al Landers thanked the efforts of many Perris staff employees, from administrators to planners to technicians, who toiled behind the scenes to bring the solar project to fruition. Those include assistant city manager Ron Carr, who negotiated the deal with Honeywell that required no city funds and will net Perris taxpayers \$1.8 million between now and 2028.

"Without their commitment and determination, it would never have come to pass," Landers said. "For a little city, we are on the cutting edge. We have a vision for the future. We're going to show the big boys how it's done."

Honeywell executives said the Solar Shine Project marked one of the first times they linked up with a municipality on a project that combined renewable technology with more traditional energy retrofits. The company worked with Perris officials to make sure the solar carports conformed to the city's Spanish mission architecture.

"People want to leave a legacy," said Cathy Ward, Region General Manager for Honeywell Building Solutions. "They want to take pride in their city, do something for the environment and hand over a thriving community to their children. This project helps on all three fronts."

Ed Orrett, senior account executive for SPG Solar, which helped Honeywell design and build the solar project, said Perris residents should be proud that they live in a town committed to "controlling energy costs for decades."

"Investment in solar power is not insignificant," Orrett said. "Certainly, the city deserves all the compliments it has received."

Praise for Perris' innovation keeps coming in from the county and state.

Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley hailed the program, saying that "it continues in the proud tradition of demonstrating the highest quality and most effective delivery of public services to California residents. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said the program proves Californians can "secure and stronger economy and a cleaner environment for generations to come if we work together."



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"It's good to number Perris among those making tremendous strides to address its environmental impact and community sustainment," the governor wrote in a letter. "You're the true action heroes!"



City staff members received praise for their work on the solar collection system.

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