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Sequim hotel Peninsula's first lodge with solar power

By Jeff Chew
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SEQUIM -- Holiday Inn Express and Conference Center is the North Olympic Peninsula's only lodging establishment to augment power consumption with energy from the sun, says the owner of the company that installed the solar array.

Bret Wirta, owner-chief executive officer of Wirta Hospitality Worldwide, which owns Sequim's newest hotel, sees the solar array of 44 panels as a marketing tool, as well as a way to use "green" energy.

"There is a big marketing component there," Wirta said. "There are a lot of people who would rather use a hotel that's getting energy from the sun."

The array -- acquired through, and installed by, Port Townsend's Power Trip Energy -- is highly visible on the hotel's roof off U.S. Highway 101 near the East Washington Street exit.

Andy Cochrane, Power Trip Energy owner and president, who was involved in the mid-August installation of the inn's solar array and inverters, said the solar array is the only one on a hotel or motel in the Peninsula.

The array will power up to 17 percent of the hotel's energy.

Putting that into perspective, Wirta said the system will supply enough energy to light and heat the inn's 250-seat, 2,600-square-foot conference center.

The company and Clallam County Public Utility District, which referred Wirta to Power Trip when he was planning to build the inn, worked with Wirta's company to secure a Small Business Administration loan to finance most of the solar system valued at \$65,000.

The 10.34 kilowatt array will most likely generate 11,000 kilowatt hours a year, Cochrane said.

Of Power Trip's solar projects -- 27 so far this year -- Cochrane said the hotel's was among the larger ones.

"It's definitely the biggest on a commercial facility," said Cochrane, whose company has installed more than 160 solar systems on the Peninsula and elsewhere around the Northwest since 2003.

While Wirta believes the Sequim hotel may be the first to go solar in the Northwest, that could not be confirmed.

The hotel is using other energy efficiencies.

The Holiday Inn Express was built with energy efficient windows, lighting and insulation, and the inn's manager, Tony Skinner, said the company has plans to use all compostable supplies, such as cups, to bypass the landfill.

The company's other property, The Quality Inn on River Road at Highway 101, has an Energy Star rating for its energy efficiencies.

The Quality Inn worked with the group Clean the World, which sterilizes and sends the inn's unused soap to Third World countries.

Cochrane said Wirta's company recognizes that many people take energy conservation and their carbon footprint into account when it comes to making hotel bookings.

"There's that competitive advantage over other facilities because of it," Cochrane said.

Wirta, Cochrane and Mattias Jarvegren, Clallam PUD services advisor, will talk about solar power and its advantages in Sequim at the Sequim-Dungeness Valley Chamber of Commerce noon luncheon Tuesday at the Holiday Inn Express conference center, 1441 E. Washington St.

The Sequim City Council has listed as one of its top priorities making Sequim a leader in renewable energy, such as solar.

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