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Solar power project will benefit UGA and Georgia Power

By **JIM THOMPSON** updated Wednesday, December 16, 2015 - 6:44am **0 comments**

Sunlight fell generously across rows upon rows of solar panels off South Milledge Avenue in Athens on Tuesday afternoon to mark the beginning of a solar energy partnership between Georgia Power Company and the University of Georgia. It's an initiative the Georgia Public Service Commission will be watching as Georgia Power, and other utilities across the state, look toward diversifying their portfolio of options for power generation.

"Looking at a diverse portfolio is critical," Georgia Power Chairman, President and CEO Paul Bowers told a group of UGA officials, including UGA President Jere Morehead, local and state elected officials and others gathered for a ribbon-cutting on land leased to Georgia Power by UGA for a Georgia Power-financed project to learn more about "solar tracking," or arranging solar panels to follow the sun to most effectively maximize power generation.

The panels, located in the edge of a wooded area just out of view of South Milledge Avenue near the

State Botanical Garden, are arranged in three separate configurations, some facing south, others facing southwest. Some of the panels will simply track the sun as it moves overhead, while others will also change compass directions to more closely track the sun. On average, in their current configuration, the panels move once every couple of minutes.

The aim of the solar tracking project, according to Georgia Public Service Commissioner Tim Echols, an advocate of alternative energy sources including solar power generation, is to determine which of the tracking configurations offers the most efficiency. That data could, Echols said Tuesday, guide Georgia Power and other utility companies, along with the Public Service Commission, which regulates a number of utilities in the state, in deciding what types of solar arrays should be installed around Georgia.

Having the Georgia Power long-term research facility on land leased to the utility by UGA also provides "a great opportunity" for the university's



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engineering students, along with other students interested in alternative energy sources, to learn firsthand about solar energy, Echols told the dozens of people on hand for Tuesday's ribbon-cutting.

For Morehead, having the long-term solar tracking research facility at the university fits directly in to the school's new experiential learning initiative, which requires every undergraduate "to do something significant outside the classroom in their field of study."

The Georgia Power facility also ties into the university's expanding commitment to research enterprises, Morehead said, offering new and important opportunities to UGA's graduate students. Morehead went on to tell the group gathered for Tuesday's ribbon-cutting that the project shows "the best about what we do in the state of Georgia," linking public institutions with private enterprises in initiatives that both support students in their educational endeavors and benefit the public.

In thanking Georgia Power for its support of the project, Morehead said, "It's going to be good for the University of Georgia, and I'm confident it's going to be good for the state of Georgia."

In addition to looking at how best to utilize solar panels in harnessing the sun's energy, the Georgia Power facility on UGA's South Milledge tract also will be used for at least some preliminary investigation into battery-based storage of power that isn't immediately placed onto the electrical grid.

There is a small battery array located with the solar panels that will, Bowers said, help Georgia Power as it looks at what's ahead in connection with generating electrical power from the sun.

"Where are we headed?" Bowers asked. "Is it going to be batteries?"

The UGA-Georgia Power solar tracking facility was installed by Radiance Solar, an Atlanta-based company that works with institutional, utility and commercial customers. The facility is capable of generating 1.25 megawatts of power, and should soon be sending that power to Georgia Power customers.

Echols said he is expecting to see some sort of report from Georgia Power on its solar-tracking initiative in about a year, after the utility has had an opportunity to determine how the solar panels operate in all four seasons in Georgia.

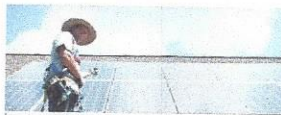
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