

# Solar farm switched on

Written by

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PRINCESS ANNE -- During what was termed "a day of history," UMES and state officials flipped the switch on a 2.2-megawatt solar farm that will allow the campus to reduce its energy bills throughout the next 20 years.

"As the Beatles say, 'Here comes the sun,' " said Sen. Jim Mathias, D-38-Worcester, during a brief outdoor ceremony at the site owned by the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

Finding ways to use clean, renewable energy is a "huge priority" for the University System of Maryland, said Chancellor William Kirwan.

"The crown jewel is this 17-acre solar farm," he said.

The facility will provide UMES with electricity at great savings and also serve as a research facility, Kirwan said.

"The people of Maryland have a real example of how clean energy can be provided," he said.

The 7,800-panel facility is the largest

concentration of photovoltaic modules on one site in Maryland, according to university officials and SunEdison, the company that built and will operate the facility.

The solar farm is projected to produce more than 3.3 million kilowatt-hours of energy in the first year alone.

SunEdison financed and built the solar farm at no cost to UMES or the state of Maryland.

In return, UMES will purchase the power produced from the solar farm at long-term predictable rates to offset the university's demand from the energy grid.

"This is a day of history," UMES President Thelma Thompson said.

The solar farm is an example of UMES' commitment to developing public-private partnerships, she said.

"We encourage others to join us," Thompson said.

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While the group at Monday's activation ceremony was mostly made up of campus and local government officials, it also included 30 Washington High School students in technology and environmental science classes.

The group also hopes to visit the nearby NASA Wallops Flight Facility, said Keith O'Neal, the school's principal.

"We're trying to show our kids what's available to them locally," he said.

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The solar farm on the UMES campus has 7,800 panels and is the largest concentration of photovoltaic modules on one site in Maryland. / Joey Gardner photo

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