

BUSINESS & FINANCIAL

'Sun-tracking' solar power at Oak Creek

Devices are the right thing to do, county says

ST. MICHAELS — If you cross the Route 33 bridge to St. Michael's during the day, you may see four high-tech, unusual-looking devices facing the sun, wherever it is. These are twin-panel, sun-tracking solar power systems Talbot County installed recently at Oak Creek Landing to provide clean, renewable energy for the facility. The systems were installed by Chuck's Electrical Inc. of Centerville, and the devices themselves are produced by Advanced Technology and Research Corp. (ATR), based in Columbia.

By tracking the sun using GPS, the devices produce up to 45 percent more power than conventional fixed panels. At Oak Creek, this clean, renewable energy provides power for the parking lot lights as well as for the marine pump-out, said Talbot County Manager John Craig.

Talbot is in the process of renovating the landing, which is one of the most heavily used and visible in the county.

"We decided to go with renewable energy at Oak Creek not only to save money, but also because it's the right thing to do," Craig said. "The sun-trackers will enable the county to light the parking lot year-round, including in winter, while saving on energy costs. And if the solar devices produce any surplus energy, it will be used to help power other county facilities."

Craig said the county considers installation of the tracking solar devices a really important project.

"There's a pride factor involved: We're proud that we're in the forefront of using renewable energy," Craig said.

The Oak Creek Landing project is what he described as "part of a comprehensive



A sun-tracking solar panel was recently installed at Oak Creek Landing to supply power to the parking lot lights as well as to the electric grid.

strategy to move toward renewable energy." "I just had two citizens comment on how impressed they are by our using renewable energy (at Oak Creek) and moving in this direction," he said.

The Oak Creek Landing installation represents the first use of this sun-tracking technology by Talbot County, and the high-visibility location showcases the county's commitment to innovative green technologies such as this system, according to Rob Lundahl, ATR's vice president for energy systems and automation.

"We're pleased that Talbot County has chosen to install this cutting-edge technology," he said.

The power generated during the day is not stored but

rather supplied directly to the electrical grid, Lundahl said.

"This type of 'grid tied' solar system is gaining popularity for both commercial and residential installations since it avoids the expense of a battery storage system," Lundahl said. "The four sun-tracking units installed at Oak Creek will produce about 10 kilowatt-hours of clean power every day, all year long."

ATR has developed several innovative solar products — all incorporating sun-tracking technology — including home do-it-yourself models, solar-powered car-chargers and even wind/solar hybrid systems. One such hybrid was installed last year at Tilghman Island by Fluharty's Electric, based in Tilghman.