

A bright future for solar?

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“I’m still seeing interest in solar,” said Jack Pfunder, executive director of the Manufacturers Resource Center in Bethlehem. “I see that solar is not dead because of the lower price of panels; the payback is getting better.”

However, he said most of the incentives, including solar technology funding from the state and federal government and tax credits has pretty much dried up and is not as strong as it was several years ago.

Still, Pfunder said a variety of businesses are installing solar panels and, from a manufacturing standpoint, solar power is more logical than wind, since most businesses are not going to be installing wind structures on top of their buildings.

Earlier this year, RGS Energy installed thousands of solar panels on a plot of land owned by Moravian Academy off Green Pond Road near Route 22 in Bethlehem.

Also, Lehigh Valley Health Network recently installed solar panels on the roofs of three of its buildings, including the Cedar Crest campus and the Muhlenberg location.

Eric Schwartz, CEO of Windkits LLC of Upper Macungie Township, said all forms of alternative energy can play a role in making a significant impact on improving the environment and energy independence.

“There is very much a future for solar,” said Jim Kurtz, president of RER Energy Group of Reading. His company installs solar/renewable energy technology for homes and businesses.

“If you are looking at long-term investment infrastructure, solar panels are warranted for 20 years, but the panels last about 30 to 40 years.”

While people who install solar panels may not see payback for seven years, the return on their investment is between 10 percent and 12 percent every year, said Kurtz. Where do you find that? It’s a high return for a low risk.”

He said this allows people to earn double digit returns for 30 to 40 years.

In Pennsylvania, the majority of solar panels that are going in are being installed in solar farms, said Robert Castellano, president of SolarPA in New Tripoli. His company works with solar manufacturers to coat cells for solar panels.

Most of the solar business was being pushed by individual governments of countries such as Germany and Spain, who were underwriting much of these solar power installations, said Castellano.

“These companies, primarily in China, were getting good government backing to build these facilities, and now there’s no business, now governments are not backing the installations,” said Castellano.