

Hawthorne solar plan puts sun to work

By Sandy Mazza Staff Writer

Posted: 09/04/2010 07:16:13 AM PDT

Updated: 09/04/2010 10:01:00 PM PDT



Chris Slade's glasses reflect the solar panels he is helping install on the roof of the Hawthorne Memorial Center. (Brad Graverson Staff Photographer)

The roof of the Hawthorne Memorial Center is now covered in more than 1,000 solar panels that reflect images of the nearby date palm trees.

The collection of dark, translucent cells looks so much like a serene pond that dragonflies buzz around the 45,000-square-foot area.

In a few weeks, it will power the lights, computers, gym equipment, air conditioning system and other energy users at the complex on El Segundo Boulevard and Prairie Avenue.

City officials believe the new system will shave \$70,000 a year off of the center's annual \$90,000 energy costs. Combined with an electric company refund, this makes it worthwhile for the city to invest \$350,000 from its general fund reserves into the project, according to Public Works Director Arnie Shadbehr.

"The moment we connect to the grid system, we start receiving a \$10,000 a month rebate from Edison and it continues for five years," Shadbehr said. "It offsets the money we're fronting."

The entire project will cost more than \$1 million, and is largely funded by a \$760,000 federal stimulus grant, Shadbehr said.

This is the first and only planned city-initiated solar panel installation, and it was chosen because of the large amount of roof area on the Memorial Center, Shadbehr said. But several prominent businesses have been using solar energy for years, including Lithographics Inc., Costco and Space Exploration Technologies Corp.

Each of the 1,064 panels generates

enough energy to light two light bulbs, Shadbehr said. The direct current electric charge coming from the solar cells is funneled through a fuse breaker into three inverters. There, it converts into an alternating current so it can be used to power a variety of devices.

"We can produce energy now for the next 20 years," Shadbehr said. "It provides energy for everything we have here."