

## Solar power fuels growth for Letterhead Press

\$1.5 million in savings makes a strong business case for solar

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**Rich Rovito**

Wisconsin  
Manufacturing  
Extension  
Partnership  
(WMEP)  
Manufacturing  
industry reporter

Using renewable energy as a means of controlling rising energy costs and promoting sustainability is finding favor among Wisconsin manufacturers. Letterhead Press Inc., a New Berlin print finisher and packaging manufacturer, is a prime example.

The company has installed a 337-kilowatt array, one of the largest solar fields in the state, to provide about 75 percent of its peak electricity demand and 25 percent of its overall annual needs.

“We all know that the cost of electricity is going up dramatically,” Letterhead Press President Michael Graf said. “My goal is to make this company 100 percent self-sufficient. Some people might think that’s crazy, but five years from now I believe people will look back and say we had a really good idea.”

Letterhead no longer wanted to rely entirely on an electricity grid that Graf described as “kind of unreliable and definitely very expensive.”

“Producing energy on site makes a lot more sense,” Graf said.

The array, which consists of 1,300 solar panels, sits on a parking lot behind the Letterhead Press plant at 16800 W. Ryerson Road.

Letterhead Press sought the assistance of the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership (WMEP) in its effort to become more sustainable in its operations.

“We reviewed Letterhead Press’ plan to implement a solar system and validated the company’s energy calculations,” said Herb Hannam, manufacturing specialist at the WMEP.

The WMEP’s involvement ensured the proper scope for the project, according to John Davis, the company’s continuous improvement manager.

“Herb crunched the numbers and made it right-sized, and gave us the feeling of comfort in terms of the size and the dimension of the project,” Davis said.



LPI’s 337kW array is one of the largest solar fields in the state.



**SunPeak**

440 Science Drive Madison WI 53711

608-535-4554 • TOLL FREE 844-NO-CARBON (844-662-2726)

[contact@sunpeakpower.com](mailto:contact@sunpeakpower.com) | [sunpeakpower.com](http://sunpeakpower.com)

SunPeak Power, a Madison commercial solar developer, installed the panels on the Letterhead site. The Letterhead Press project is the largest solar installation in Waukesha County and was the second-largest in Wisconsin last year, said Matt Bellehumeur, sales development director for SunPeak. The solar array is projected to reduce Letterhead Press' energy costs by 18 percent and save the company about \$1.5 million over the life of the system, he added.

Overall, Letterhead Press now has the 10th largest solar installation in Wisconsin, according to Tyler Huebner, executive director of Renew Wisconsin, a nonprofit organization that promotes clean energy strategies.

"Solar really is a tool for competitive businesses," Huebner said.

A grant from Wisconsin Focus on Energy, a statewide energy efficiency and renewable resources program, supported the solar project.

Letterhead Press also has cut its energy use by 40 percent through various projects in recent years. The solar project was the next logical step to make Letterhead Press' products and services more economically competitive and environmentally sustainable.

"By taking 25 percent of our electricity, and we use a lot of electricity, and locking that in at a certain price for five years, once you've recouped your return on investment you are producing \$50,000 or \$60,000 worth of electricity per year for free," Davis said.

The initiative by Letterhead Press makes a strong business case for sustainability efforts.

"Companies with visionary leadership, as is the case with Letterhead Press, prove that sustainability can be profitable," said Tim Wiora, the WMEP's chief executive officer and executive director.

In addition to its sustainability efforts, Letterhead Press has implemented other plans to grow its business, including tapping into the export market. The company took part in the WMEP's ExporTech program.

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation set up trade venture trips to Mexico and Canada for Letterhead Press, to assist the company in attracting new customers.

Letterhead Press leveraged several opportunities, including the WMEP's ExporTech training, to develop an appropriate exporting strategy.

Letterhead Press and the WMEP's involvement extends even beyond the solar project and exporting initiatives. They have worked together on others as well, including lean manufacturing and a current recycling project.

"The WMEP has been helpful to us on a number of different projects," Davis said.

*For more information on the WMEP's sustainability, exporting and other program offerings, go to [www.wmep.org](http://www.wmep.org).*