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Splash City now riding on solar powered waves

BY WILL BUSS
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COLLINSVILLE – The water pumping and flowing down the slides and waterfalls throughout a metro-east water park are powered by sunshine.

Collinsville Area Recreation District has installed 679 solar panels on three different arrays at Splash City Waterpark at 1605 Eastport Plaza Drive. Two of the arrays are located within the water park, including one located over the Flowrider, a stationary surfing area in the park. The third and largest array is in the adjacent parking lot and resembles a pavilion that will provide shade for up to 55 vehicles.

The panels were installed by the end of March, and savings are already showing. Park district administrative assistant Kim Derossett said the first electric bill has arrived, and the park district saved \$700 in April.

“We were kind of amazed,” Derossett said. “We were all very happy.”

Water park aquatic director Ryan Besse said the new panels will place less reliance on the grid. He said the park district hopes to add more solar panels at the water park in the near future.

“It should cut our electric bill by quite a bit by going green and not having to use as many outside sources coming in,” Besse said. “It’s just a nice feature that looks good and is a good way to give back.”

The new infrastructure was made possible by a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, which helped fund 49 percent – \$417,690 – of the \$853,347 renewable solar energy system. Collinsville-based solar panel installer provider Day & Night Solar was hired for the job.

Melinda Kershaw, who is the company’s marketing director, said the grant is awarded each January and July and provides up to 60 percent of solar panel installation costs for nonprofit organizations and government entities.

Kershaw said the new solar panels should help the water park’s energy costs decrease by 25 percent from June through August and should offset annual energy expenses by \$27,405 a year. She said that is the equivalent of reducing carbon dioxide emissions from 15-and-a-half homes.

“When the park is not running, they will save a significant amount of power,” Kershaw said. “Solar panels perform best in the spring and fall time frames, because the water pumps are not on until they turn on those pumps and start utilizing that power.”

Day & Night Solar provides solar panel installation nationwide and has completed projects in Puerto Rico. Locally, the company has installed solar panels on the campus of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, the Edwardsville School District 7, Illinois-American Water Co. office off Illinois 15 in Belleville and at the water treatment plant in Holiday Shores.

Kershaw said solar paneling has become more affordable within the past five years, and Illinois provides various grants to help offset the cost of installation.

“The pricing has dropped drastically in the product,” she said. “Now it’s more affordable. As energy prices continue to rise, it’s definitely a viable solution for offsetting power.”

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