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Deltona seeks \$\$ to create solar center



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Stimulus funds could pay to train 'green' workers

By Al Everson
BEACON STAFF WRITER

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Weeks of secrecy in Deltona ended Oct. 19, as the City Commission learned about an economic-development initiative to promote solar power and bring jobs to the area.



BEACON PHOTO/AL EVERSON
Marion Daly

City officials are seeking between \$2 million and \$4 million under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act — commonly known as the Stimulus Bill — to “create a vocational-training center for solar cells.”

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The announcement was made by Deltona Planning and Development Services Director Chris Bowley.

“We feel like we submitted a strong grant in short order,” Bowley said. “Hopefully by the end of December, I’ll have something to report.”

Work on the grant application began in August. The city applied to the U.S. Department of Labor, under the Pathways Out of Poverty program.

“This is a wonderful, wonderful opportunity,” said Marion Daly, a consultant who worked on the application.

City officials attended a seminar on alternative energy in Orlando this summer, City Commissioner Janet Deyette said. Deltona had to scramble to refine the idea of making the city into a green-energy center, and to seek federal help to make it happen.

“We had to be kind of quiet, because of the fear of competition,” Deyette said.

The grant could enable Deltona to train as many as 800 people for careers in solar and other forms of green energy.

Deltona stands a good chance of securing the grant, Daly said, because of its high rate of unemployment. While Volusia County has a jobless rate of about 11.7 percent, Deltona’s rate is at or approaching 12 percent.



“It was about 11.9 when I left,” Daly said. “I’m very focused on the 6,000 people who are not working.”

The latest national unemployment number is 9.8 percent.

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the city will work to bring together people who need work and opportunities to offer green-technology employment. The goal of Deltona's initiative, Daly said, is to prepare people to work in the solar industries, then to invite manufacturers into the city to hire the ready-made labor force.



Educational institutions, private charities, labor unions and government agencies will join the effort. The charities will assist in screening and referring unemployed people to the training.

"It's associated with a group of partners," Development Director Bowley said.

The partners include the Florida Solar Energy Center of the University of Central Florida, the Center for Business Excellence, the Salvation Army, Community Life, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and Sylvan Learning Center.

The combined effort would recruit and train workers to manufacture photovoltaic cells and solar-thermal equipment, especially solar water-heating systems. Others could be trained to make existing homes in Deltona more energy-efficient, especially by installing new windows and doors.

"One and a half million dollars is provided from the grant for weatherizing. Once we have the trained work force, we will put them to work in Deltona," Daly said. "You could reduce 50 to 70 percent of your electric bill by weatherizing."

Deltona has both the workers and the work.

"We have the perfect situation. We have so many homes that need rehabbing," Deyette said.

Still others would be trained to market solar-energy products at major-name retailers such as Lowe's or Home Depot.

City officials are scouting for possible sites for the training center, cautiously hopeful their idea will get the green light for the stimulus funding. So far, no solar-equipment manufacturers have indicated an interest in operating in Deltona, but Daly said he hopes that will change.

"There are only two places where photovoltaic cells are being made. One is in California, and the other is China," Daly said.

Deltona, located in the Sunshine State and close to the Kennedy Space Center and other energy-research facilities, is well-positioned to become a leader in the production of solar products, he said.

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