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A 19th Century theater gets a 21st Century electricity makeover

By Colleen Wilson

September 9, 2015 No Comment

The Tarrytown Music Hall was constructed in 1885, six years after Thomas Edison first demonstrated the light bulb in Menlo Park about 60 miles away in New Jersey.

Now, 130 years after the historic concert venue opened its doors, a new form of electricity generation is being introduced to the music hall: solar panels.

Ninety solar panels are being mounted to the east facing side of the building's roof and, once in place, are estimated to account for 27 percent of the theater's annual electricity requirements, according to SunBlue Energy, the Sleepy Hollow-based company installing the panels.

The Tarrytown Music Hall is the first historic and commercial building in the village to have solar panels.

When the light bulb first caught on, it was seen as an inexpensive innovation, but now, more than a century later, new technology, like solar panels, has been developed to supplant that notion. The new panels are expected to save Tarrytown Music Hall about \$2,600 a year in electricity bills, according to Barrett Silver, the senior vice president of sales and marketing with SunBlue.

"We're bringing a 130-year-old building into the 21st Century," Mike Smith, the facilities manager at the theater, said.

The system, which cost \$72,000 to install, is paid for with a \$50,000 grant from the Sun Club sustainability program offered through Green Mountain Energy Co., a green products company based in New York City. The remaining \$22,000 is covered through rebates offered by the N.Y.-Sun Incentive Program through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

"We were invited to submit a proposal and they came and they saw what we're doing here and we were allowed into this grant," Alison Woods, director of community partnerships for the theater, who helped secure the grant, said. "It really says a lot about the future and longevity of the music hall."

Tarrytown Music Hall officially announced the beginning of the solar panel installation at a press conference earlier this month that included Silver, and Priya Mulgaonkar, a campaign organizer for nonprofit Environment New York.

Coupled with the display of Tarrytown's latest sustainable initiative, Mulgaonkar announced the release of the organization's latest report — compiled with the Frontier Group, an environmental think tank — outside the music hall Sept. 3.

Called Lighting the Way III: The Top States That Helped Drive America's Solar Energy Boom in 2014, the joint report compared states in terms of overall solar capacity — measured in megawatts of electricity generated — and megawatts per capita. The report used data from the Solar Energy Industries Association.

Among all 50 states, New York ranked ninth in overall solar capacity through 2014 with 397 megawatts of solar electricity and seventh in the amount of solar megawatts installed in the last year with 147 megawatts.

The state did not break the Top 10 for solar electric capacity per capita through 2014, which the report said was due to its high residential population. New York was 15th in that category.

According to 2014 census data, California, Texas, Florida and New York are the most populated states in the country. Of those, only California was in the Top 10 for solar megawatt installation per capita, ranking fourth.

"In New York, state leaders have encouraged solar growth with a combination of market preparation policies," the report said.

One of those policies is net metering, a process that disperses extra energy generated into the electrical utility grid and gives a market-rate credit to the company whose solar installation created the surplus power. The report specifically mentions a program approved by the state Public Utility Commission in July allowing communities to participate in this credit system, which can incentivize localities to build large-scale solar projects.

"The new rules follow other recent moves to encourage solar energy, including a 10-year commitment to invest \$1 billion in New York solar energy through a megawatt block program, with the goal of adding 3,000 megawatts of solar capacity," the report said.

That block program, the NY-Sun Incentive Program that helped fund the Tarrytown Music Hall's solar project, is a private-public partnership that formed in August 2014.

"One of the big reasons that going solar means saving money is, by the time you figure in all of the rebates and tax credits, the government, in one form or another, is paying more than half the cost of the system," Silver said. "And that's a good deal."

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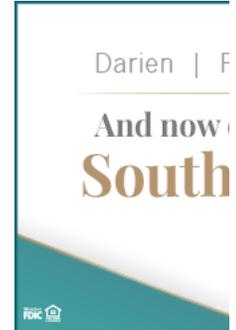
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