

St. Petersburg Times

By Ivan Penn and Kameel Stanley, Times Staff Writers
In Print: Thursday, November 15, 2012

St. Petersburg's SunTrust building going green, saving thousands



Solar Energy Management finds 40% energy reduction at SunTrust building

Going green is becoming increasingly important to businesses' bottom lines.

Two years ago, for instance, Scott Gramling, CEO of Wallace, Welch & Willingham, began looking for ways to cut costs at the SunTrust building in downtown St. Petersburg.

At first, Gramling considered solar carports for the top floor of the parking garage attached to the five-story, 50,000-square-foot building.

But after meeting with the head of renewable energy firm Solar Energy Management, he moved on to a more feasible and comprehensive strategy to lower the SunTrust building's utility costs.

"Our team went in there and

found 40 percent energy reductions," said Scott McIntyre, president and chief executive officer of Solar Energy Management. "It's a combination of technologies."

The estimated \$320,000 project provides upgrades to lighting, improvements to ventilation, use of window film and installation of a 50-kilowatt solar electric system with rooftop solar panels.

In all, the project is expected to save about \$70,000 a year, with a payback in 4.5 years, McIntyre said. The solar system alone is expected to save \$12,000 a year in electricity costs. The project received an \$80,000 grant from Progress Energy Florida's SunSense Program and \$49,500 in federal tax incentives.

Gramling's operation joins a growing number of Tampa Bay area businesses that are turning to renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Landmarc Contracting of Tampa hasn't paid Tampa Electric in more than a year after turning its 2,600-square-foot office building into a net energy producer with a \$60,000 solar electric system.

And a net zero energy building in downtown St. Petersburg is set to open next month with four tenants who will have no electric bills to speak of.

"Greener is better," Gramling said. "We wanted to lower our power bill. On Sundays, when hardly anyone is here, we'll actually be back-feeding to the grid."