By the Light of the Sun

Cripple Creek Golf and Country Club takes advantage of grants and incentives to make solar power a reality at its facilities.

BY GLEN MACDONALD

ustainability is a term used frequently by many professions and industries in recent vears. Lessening our environmental footprint and perhaps saving money in the process are important to all of us, or at least they should be. Cripple Creek Golf and Country Club is located on a tidal marsh just off the Indian River in Delaware, and we have always been conscious of our environmental impact. While the concept of sustainability is something that everyone embraces, implementation of sustainable practices must also make financial sense, especially given the current challenging economics of the golf industry. With this in mind, in 2010 club officials at Cripple Creek began to evaluate the potential benefits of using alternative energy sources to supply at least a portion of the energy needs of our golf facility.

An energy committee was formed to evaluate alternative energy options, including wind, geothermal, and solar power. We investigated the grants and subsidies for alternative energy projects that were available from different levels of government that might make our project more affordable. When all the facts were evaluated, it was determined that solar power was a viable option to produce a portion of the energy needed to power different areas of the golf facility. Fortunately, there are now many golf facilities around the U.S. that derive some or all of their energy from solar sources. Cripple Creek was the first golf facility in Delaware to embrace this technology on a large scale.

Our project went out to bid, and the contract was awarded to Flexera, a full-service solar energy contractor based in Delaware. By using an instate company to build and design the solar system as well using materials produced in Delaware, the project qualified for additional state subsidies.



Flexera was also very helpful in guiding us through the various subsidies that were available for our project.

Flexera performed a detailed energy audit to identify all avenues of power savings for our facility and designed a series of solar systems that suited our needs. Our goal was to install the solar panels in areas where they would blend in or at least be out of plain view. Rooftops of the pool house, cart barn, and maintenance facility were all fitted with solar panels. For the irrigation system, a ground-mounted system was installed. In late 2010, installation of the systems began. The solar panel systems were in operation on the pool house and cart barn soon thereafter. The maintenance facility and irrigation panels were completed in January and February 2011, respectively. The total installation cost of the system for Cripple Creek, once incentives and subsidies were factored in. was \$180.000.

In the first full year of operation, energy purchases were reduced by 45 percent, or \$18,500. In the middle of 2012, the sale of SRECs (Solar Renewable Energy Credits) back to the power grid began, which will help further enhance our return on investment. With the sale of SRECs combined with energy savings, the payback for the systems will be less than five years. This is a relatively short time for an investment that will continue to benefit the facility financially for many years to come.

Incentives for alternative energy sources are different in every state, and these incentives are constantly changing. If your facility is considering installation of alternative energy sources, be sure to do your homework. The start and completion date of your project may significantly impact the options for subsidies and incentives.

Through the dog days of summer, we, as superintendents, often lament those long, hot, sunny days. For us and the turf, an overcast day is a welcomed break from the heat. Now, at least we know that our facility is benefiting from that intense summer sun, allowing us to conserve money in the process. Using solar energy helps the environment by using a clean and renewable energy source to help power our operations, but ultimately this project will benefit Cripple Creek Golf and Country Club in the foreseeable future.

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Solar panels were mounted atop roofs of the maintenance facility, pool house, and cart barn to limit their aesthetic impact. The savings in electricity costs combined with the sale of SRECs (Solar Renewable Energy Credits) back to the power grid will recover the cost of the investment in less than five years.

