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Business leaders talk green energy in Jersey City

By Jared Kaltwasser

Election talk subsided — mostly — Tuesday morning as North Jersey business leaders gathered at the **Hyatt** Regency hotel, in Jersey City, for the 39th annual St. Peter's College Regents Business Symposium. The theme of the event was "Going Green, Going Global: The Costs and Benefits to Business."

Ralph LaRossa, president and chief operating officer at **PSE&G**, led off a morning full of speakers by talking about his company's efforts to promote solar energy and energy efficiency.

PSE&G's Solar 4 All program, for instance, aims to put 80 megawatts of solar electricity capacity in the state, including 40 megawatts' worth of solar panels on utility poles.

He noted that that program has helped build jobs, particularly on the manufacturing side, where South Plainfield-based manufacturer **Petra Solar** has thrived.

"We're trying to create some jobs, create some opportunities for folks ... but do it in such a way that we can give back to our customers," LaRossa said.

LaRossa said the company's energy-efficiency programs have also helped to create jobs doing energy audits and installing energy-efficiency equipment. He said the company is making those investments because it believes it's good for the public and, in turn, shareholders, but added that the utility has been hit hard by the recession. He said PSE&G, a \$15 billion company, is beset by late payments from residential and commercial customers alike.

"Right now, people are not paying their bills in this state to the tune of \$1 billion," he said. "[That's] just us. That's an amazing amount of money out there."

Dawn Murray, the U.S. environmental sustainability director for financial services giant **ING**, spoke about the many ways her company was able to make its office greener, from investing in clean energy, to scaling back on paper printing, to eliminating the use of disposable coffee cups.

Murray said she was able to make sweeping changes at ING's U.S. properties because she knew she had the support of management.

"Fortunately, I had leeway that we could make some pretty enterprise-wide decisions, which was helpful," she said. "You're not just making [changes] at a local level, you're able to push it out to all of your sites, so that there's a consistent message that goes out."

Those efforts helped the company achieve a 14 percent reduction in energy expenses since 2007, despite a 3 percent rise in its per-kilowatt-hour rate. The company also reduced its paper usage by 38 percent.

And while most of the talk did center on green energy, the importance of the events going on at polling locations throughout the state was not lost on the crowd. For his part, LaRossa mentioned the enormous impact elections can have on utilities. He said the company likes the idea of investing in nuclear energy, a zero-emissions energy source, but expanding PSE&G's Artificial Island site would cost about \$15 billion.

He said that's a tricky investment to make, in part because even if the company gets the support of current leaders in Trenton and Washington, that doesn't mean their nuclear initiatives will have the support of future administrations.

"The biggest question we have is whether or not we can get it built in four years," he said. "And right now, that's impossible."

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