Solar charging station is newest exhibit at Duke's World of Energy

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SENECA — With nearly 50 years under its belt, the World of Energy has a long story to tell. And its most recent chapter focuses on the newest addition to Duke Energy's portfolio — solar energy.

Sitting outside the education center, a new solar charging station is powered by a 250-watt, 3-by-5-foot solar panel and features 120-volt and USB outlets for charging small electronic devices atop a 36-inch round table. A marine battery in its base stores electricity for later, when the sun's not shining.

World of Energy manager Chris Rimel said that is the crux of solar energy — it's only good when the sun is out, unless there's sufficient storage.

But Duke has mastered the science of energy storage with its Bad Creek Hydroelectric Station, harnessing water's power in the Bad Creek reservoir and releasing it as power is needed. The company understands the value of a diversified energy portfolio and wants to educate the public about the various resources.

Rimel said the solar exhibit also helps tell the story of land use.

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SOLAR: Display highlights company's role in renewable energy

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"Duke Energy's Warsaw Solar Farm in North Carolina provides 65 megawatts of electricity, when the sun shines, on 550 acres of flat land," he said. "Turn around from the solar station, and you can see Oconee Nuclear Station. There's more than 2,500 megawatts being generated 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year — on a footprint of 510 acres."

The World of Energy was built as a gift to the community to see the nuclear site rising in the 1970s. Now, almost 50 years later, Duke is much more than nuclear. The new solar display highlights the company's increased role as a leader in renewable energy while adding an educational and fun exhibit to the education center.

"We jumped at the chance to add the solar station to our exhibits," Rimel said. "And it's good timing with longer days and more sun as we move into spring and summer."

He hopes visitors learn that solar energy is viable at certain times and a good part of Duke's entire energy package. And he also wants the public to keep in mind that there are pros and cons of each energy source, but know that the common denominator at Duke is clean energy.

"It's also no accident the carbon-free solar exhibit is next to Duke's single largest carbon-free energy source," Rimel said. "Oconee Nuclear Station, like all nuclear plants, produces clean energy — no carbon dioxide at all. In South Carolina, the four nuclear stations are responsible for 93 percent of the state's carbon-free electricity."

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SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Students from Christ Church Episcopal School in Greenville listen to Duke Energy communications consultant Andrew Beckner explain how solar energy is turned into electricity at the World of Energy education center at Oconee Nuclear Station. The solar charging station is the newest exhibit at the World of Energy.