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Interest in solar power is generating some educational programs

By Bob Karlovits
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Community College of Allegheny County has begun a program to train installers of solar modules in an effort to "conserve and be part of the solution," says Judy Savolskis, interim vice president for work-force development.

She says the program works in two directions.

It is part of the school's "green initiative" dealing with matters of renewable energy sources. But it also is part of an effort to make students and workers capable of getting "green" jobs by retooling them for newer tasks.

The solar panel program is being done with Local 95 of the International Union of Operating Engineers, which also is part of the college's attempt to use "third parties" in its training programs.

In a similar way, Joe Morinville, owner of Energy Independent Solutions in Robinson, is involved in a program at the Pittsburgh Job Corps Center in the East End, which will create a usable photovoltaic project as well as teaching students how to work with solar equipment.

Solar Power Industries goes beyond its manufacturing role and offers courses for photovoltaic installers at its Rostraver site, says Robert P. Stoehr, manager of photovoltaic systems.

Stephen Lee, head of the School of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon University, says the university's approach to matters of renewable energy sometimes puzzles people.

"They look and see no course like Energy-Saving 101 and they wonder where we are," he says.

That is because issues of sustainability and renewability are handled in a broader manner. Programs in architecture, civil engineering and public policy all are rooted in sustainable design and urban design, he says.

All of those programs operate under the Steinbrenner Institute for Environmental Education and Research, a program set up to guide learning on such issues.

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