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Woodbridge blazing trail to the sun

Woodbridge is a national leader in ... well, what?

Ask the average township resident, or most Central Jerseyans, and the sardonic answer would likely be something like property taxes, or traffic, or political corruption.

But no, this is a good thing, at least among those who don't believe global warming is a myth being perpetuated by Al Gore. Woodbridge is at the forefront of solar energy.

Of course, it helps to have some massive commercial buildings and green-conscious companies. FedEx announced in a recent statement that it is putting up 3.3 acres worth of solar panels atop its distribution hub on Industrial Avenue, making it the largest solar farm in the country. Over in the Keasbey part of Woodbridge, the Bayshore Recycling Corp. is installing a \$5.7 million solar system that will provide much of the facility's power.

The community itself is also embracing the cause. Township officials recently approved a \$5.5 million plan for solar panels on six municipal buildings that could provide the municipality with up to 15 percent of its energy needs. And the township has some outreach initiatives designed, among other things, to help promote solar energy to individual homeowners.

It's all part of a growing trend that certainly isn't limited to Woodbridge. In South Plainfield, Hall's Warehouse Corp. boasts the state's largest current rooftop solar system (20,000 panels) atop a frozen food storage building. At Merck headquarters in Readington, a 7,000-solar panel project was completed earlier this year. And across the state, New Jersey's 4,000 solar panel installations producing 87 megawatts of energy rank second only to California's solar output.

There remain plenty of skeptics questioning the cost efficiency of solar energy. It will at the very least typically take years to offset the cost of panels and installation and recognize any savings from these projects, either for single homes or larger municipal or commercial projects.

But in an era when the need for renewable energy seems so urgent, there is much to be said in praise of community officials who aren't straddling the fence agonizing over how the numbers might crunch out for political purposes. Woodbridge is playing the role of a leader, and the township deserves credit for that.
