Buffalo Niagara sees a bright future in solar

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The Buffalo Niagara region has been relying on Niagara Falls to power its electricity needs since the first street lamps were turned on. So it's only natural that, with the growing need to develop new sources of renewable energy, a light bulb went off: Buffalo Niagara is well poised to serve as a hub of solar manufacturing in the U.S.

The same strengths that led to Buffalo Niagara's original rise in the early part of the 19th century can and should be utilized to lead the region into a new era. These strengths include access to water and low-cost hydroelectric power, a strong supply chain, a skilled and diversified workforce and the availability of shovel-ready, affordable sites. When the Niagara Power Project produced its first power in 1961, it was the largest hydropower facility in the western world at the time. Today, Niagara is the biggest electricity producer in NYS, generating 2.4 million kilowatts. This low-cost electricity saves the state's residents and businesses hundreds of millions of dollars every year. Low-cost hydropower has been reserved by NYS law for companies planning to build or expand in the region. The program offers hydroelectric power at an affordable rate.

Due to the availability of low-cost power and water supply from the Niagara River, Buffalo Niagara has a number of large chemical manufacturers that are all a part of the supply chain for the solar industry. In Buffalo Niagara, renewable energy companies are surrounded by manufacturers producing the materials they need to do business. They include: Globe Metallurgical, one of the world's largest producers of silicon metal; Dupont, leading materials supplier to the PV industry, Praxair, supplier of atmospheric, process and specialty gases; Linde Gas, which manufactures industrial gases or products required by some technologies; and Occidental Chemical, a leading producer of potassium hydroxide products, chlorinated isocyanurate products, and sodium silicates.

Our region also has a strong metal manufacturing base and major companies producing solar energy components including glass, solar cells and other manufactured components.

Buffalo Niagara can also keep renewable energy companies supplied with human resources. We have a highly skilled, motivated, productive workforce; and, led by graduates of the University of Buffalo's engineering school, our region produces over 400 engineers each year, as well as a ready supply of scientists. Buffalo Niagara labor costs are lower than those of other northeastern and Great Lakes region metro areas of comparable or greater size, such as Cleveland, Ohio, Philadelphia, Pa. and Boston, Mass.

Buffalo Niagara has a strong base of universities and colleges, many of which are involved in research and development and have training programs related to renewable energies. The University of Buffalo, along with Erie Community College have developed workforce training programs designed to meet the needs of the solar industry.

NYS has been a pioneer in establishing the concept of certified "shovel-ready" sites and Buffalo Niagara is a leader in NYS in developing these sites.

With united and coordinated action, Buffalo Niagara has an unlimited potential to show the world how a declining manufacturing city can transform itself into a focal point within a new growth economy.
For more information, please visit www.buffaloniagara.org/photovoltaic.

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