

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA, Main Street Power Dedicate Solar Power Plant On St. Thomas

Business / **Published On February 26, 2015 02:04 PM /**

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The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA) and Main Street Power Company Wednesday held dedication ceremonies for a solar power generation plant in Estate Donoe on St. Thomas. The new facility, which peaked at 4.2 megawatts during testing, according to WAPA officials, is expected to provide up to five percent of the island's current base load capacity during daylight hours.

In remarks giving remarks, WAPA Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Hugo V. Hodge, Jr. said the addition of the solar farm and a similar installation on St. Croix that was dedicated in 2014 continues the authority's effort to diversify its generation resources.

"We are one of a handful of islands in the Caribbean region that can proudly say that we no longer depend on 100 percent fuel oil to generate electricity for our residents and businesses," Hodge said. "Our efforts continue to complete the propane fuel conversion in both districts and we will continue to add solar, propane and other fuel types along with some wind and biomass as is feasible."

Hodge said WAPA aims to provide "reliable electrical and water service to our rate-payers at the most affordable rates."

A 25-year solar power purchase agreement between WAPA and Main Street Power is part of the utility's strategy to deploy solar, propane and other renewables in an effort to reduce ratepayer costs. Main Street Power will manage the operations and maintenance of the facility for the duration of the agreement, in partnership with WAPA.

Hodge also asked for a moment of silence in memory of 24-year-old Jama Rhymer, an employee in the Water Division on St. Thomas, who died Sunday in an automobile accident. Rhymer is the son of WAPA Chief Operating Officer, Gregory R. Rhymer.

"Today is difficult for many of us; it is bittersweet," Hodge said. "We have a major accomplishment to celebrate with the commissioning of this solar plant, but our celebration is tinged as we have lost one of our own."

He continued: "Sometimes you find that in some sectors WAPA is viewed as some robotic operation. To the contrary, it is human beings who are dedicated and committed who make the authority what it is. The same people that were here at 8 a.m. today setting up for this event were on the streets of Sub Base at 5 this morning assisting with traffic control and other duties related to the movement of our propane storage tanks. Some that are here to witness this dedication have been at work in the electrical and water plants since midnight last night. This is what the public does not see, but as Director, I appreciate each and every one of them—they are the WAPA family."

Other speakers on the program included longtime WAPA Engineer Donald Francois, a member of the Governing Board, as well as principals of Main Street Power and Morgan Stanley.

"The project that you see up on the hill is truly a state-of-the-art power generation facility. This project will deliver clean and reliable and quiet power for many years to come. Main Street Power will operate this site for many, many years to come and we couldn't be more excited for the privilege to do that and to work closely with our partners at WAPA," said Rob Masinter, chief operating officer of Main Street Power Company.

Community and government leaders also attended the dedication and commissioning of the plant.

Feature Image: WAPA Executive Director Hugo V. Hodge, Jr. leads WAPA board member Donald Francois as well as Authority personnel and representatives of Main Street Power Company, Morgan Stanley and the V.I. Energy Office at a ribbon cutting ceremony on Feb. 25, marking the start-up of a 4.2 megawatt solar power generation

plant at Estate Donoe, St. Thomas.

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