

Vast solar farm on Chevron land gets Earth Day celebration

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Patty Canessa, the public affairs manager for Chevron Richmond, spoke Wednesday about the power of community partnerships at the MCE Solar One site along Castro Street near Hensley Street in Richmond.

In advance of Earth Day, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Wednesday for one of the Bay Area's most significant environmental achievements: the construction of a 60-acre solar farm on land provided by Chevron Richmond.

Project partners gathered at the site of MCE Solar One along Castro Street near Hensley Street, where nearly 36,000 solar panels that automatically tilt in the direction of the sun are helping to provide renewable electricity to 3,900 MCE customers, effectively eliminating 3,234 metric tons of carbon dioxide annually. The farm has the capacity to serve nearly 6 percent of Richmond's electric load, Richmond Mayor Tom Butt said.

MCE Solar One quietly [went online Dec. 22 last year](#). On Wednesday, the working solar farm was celebrated by local business, labor, government and community leaders as an Earth Day reminder of how local partnerships can create major win-win projects.

The idea to build MCE Solar One on Chevron property stemmed from a \$90 million community benefits agreement that led to the \$1 billion Chevron Refinery Modernization Project, which is currently in its last phases of construction. The agreement between city leaders and Chevron officials included repurposing and leasing 60 acres of a remediated brownfield site to MCE for 10 years at a cost of \$1 per year. That accord also provided funds to many other local projects, including \$35 million for the Richmond Promise College Scholarship program, which provides funds and guidance for all of the city's college-bound high school seniors.

Also, the agreement generated over 2,000 local construction and related jobs on the Modernization Project, along with another 341 jobs supported by the MCE Solar One project, where 50-percent of the workforce were Richmond-based contractors, suppliers and union labor. Some of those were assumed by graduates of RichmondBUILD, the award-winning city job-training program.

The solar farm's construction also gave the local economy quite a boost: about \$1.8 million was spent on project materials purchased or rented in Contra Costa County to build the solar facility.

"This really is a true demonstration of what a partnership is," Chevron Richmond Public Affairs Manager Patty Canessa said Wednesday. "The city of Richmond, MCE, labor — this is what can be done when we come together."

Dawn Weisz, CEO of MCE, remarked how the project symbolizes the Bay Area's "rich history of industrial labor and innovation."

“I’m proud that we’re not only generating electricity close to home,” added Mayor Butt.

The mayor said the collaboration “between MCE, sPower, Chevron, Cenergy Power, the City of Richmond, RichmondBUILD, and local unions makes this the largest public-private solar partnership in the Bay Area.”

MCE’s Deep Green 100-percent renewable energy customers pay a penny per kilowatt-hour premium for pollution-free wind and solar power produced in California, according to MCE. Half of the premium is then used to help fund construction of local solar projects like MCE Solar One.