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EC company creates energy-efficient lights

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WAYNE TWP. - As with the sun, it's best not to look directly into the overhead warehouse lamp made at the Appalachian Lighting Systems' Wayne Township plant.

The fixture, composed of dozens of small light-emitting diodes, throws enough light to, at a height of 40 feet, illuminate half of a warehouse. From 10 feet, it defies direct vision.

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"As you can see, it hardly throws any light," said Doug Falk, treasurer of Appalachian Lighting Systems, sarcasm in his voice.

But that isn't the beauty of Appalachian Lighting Systems' devices. Those dozens of diodes throw all that blinding light while expending far less energy than conventional counterparts.

The warehouse lamp can provide the equivalent of 400 watts with 80 watts of electricity and can be lit for up to 50,000 hours without burning out. Because they use less electricity, LED lights result in an 83 percent reduction in the emission of carbon dioxide, the most abundant greenhouse gas.

Welcome to the next generation of lighting. Falk and Appalachian Lighting president Jim Wassel, who doubles as idea man, played host Wednesday to a presentation of the company's present offerings and a bright future.

Among those in attendance were Kevin Bowser, legislative aide for state Rep. Jaret Gibbons (D-10, Ellwood City); Daniel Desmond, deputy secretary of the state Department of Environmental Protection; and Ted Tracy, of Montreal-based Future Lighting Systems, a subsidiary of Phillips LED products.

The reviews were rave.

"This is the right idea at the right time in history," said Desmond, who added that electricity deregulation rate caps are being removed over the next few years. "We're only two years from colossal rate increases."

And nobody is going to be hit harder by those increases, Desmond said, than municipal governments, which are huge consumers of electricity.

LED lighting, said Falk, could result in an 80 percent decrease in lighting costs. And, while Wassel and Falk are building the future of light, Ellwood City is serving as its laboratory.

The borough has an LED overhead streetlight at 12th Street and Factory Avenue and a decorative LED streetlight in front of the municipal building. Having a proving ground has enabled the company to tweak its products, Wassel said.

On the recommendation of Ellwood City street workers, he fixed the streetlights so they can be turned to redirect that light.

The state has established legislation that enables public entities to change their infrastructure to put more energy-efficient hardware in place and finance the projects with the expected future utility savings.

That, along with the expected electric-rate hikes, puts Appalachian Lighting Systems at the forefront of an expected LED boom. And the company is getting ready for it.

Falk said the company will be looking to hire as many as 20 people just after the new year. Eventually, he said, Appalachian Lighting Systems could grow out of its present warehouse facility, where the lights are being hand-built, into a larger facility with mass production.

If that happens, the company's workforce could grow to 400 people, Falk said.

And that could come to pass if Wassel has anything to say about it. And he does.

"This is nothing," Wassel said, as he gestured toward his streetlight and warehouse light. "You should see some of my other ideas."

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