



Published on Cleantech.com (<http://media.cleantech.com>)

The new Pod on the block

By David Ehrlich

Published September 11, 2007 - 1:25pm

Six-month old Pod Generating Group has grabbed its first deal, announcing a contract to build a \$120 million, 20 megawatt concentrator photovoltaic project in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

When complete, it would be the second largest solar plant in Canada.

The announcement comes on the heels of the province's \$56.9 billion plan to shut down coal-fired plants by 2014 and double the amount of renewable energy on the grid by 2025 (see [Ontario aims to kick out coal by 2014](#)).

"The industry as a whole has really not had Ontario on its radar screen," Glen Martin, president and COO of Pod Generating Group, told Cleantech.com.

Backed by France's Calyon, Sault Ste. Marie-based Pod Generating is a sister company of Los Angeles-based Pod Consulting Group, which Martin founded.

Originally from Sault Ste. Marie, Martin said the idea for the new company was formed back in November 2006, when the Ontario Power Authority started its Standard Offer Program.

"The OPA program is the first of its kind in North America," said Martin.

Similar to programs across Europe, the Ontario program offers to pay companies a premium for renewable energy fed into the grid.

Pod Generating has a 20-year power purchase agreement with the Ontario Power Authority for its project, made up of two 10 MW facilities. It'll be getting 42-cents Canadian per kilowatt hour produced at the plant.

Martin said that's a premium over current rates, depending on the type of power generation. But he said the OPA will be keeping the carbon credits.

Expected to be operational by the end of 2008, the two solar facilities should provide enough power for up to 7,000 Ontario homes.

But it'll be plugged into the local Sault Ste. Marie network, as part of OPA's program to promote distributed power generation.

The company, which will own and operate the project, plans to use a triple-junction gallium

arsenide concentrator photovoltaic system.

"Even though they are more expensive on a per square centimeter basis, you use significantly less, because you concentrate the solar energy onto a fairly small cell. And so what you end up with is a more cost-effective system," said Martin.

Martin said the company has requests for proposals out to several solar suppliers, and expects to make an announcement in the next few weeks.

While the company is new, Martin, who has a degree in aerospace engineering, said some of the core members of Pod Generating and Pod Consulting have been working in solar for a number of years.

"The consulting group is 10 years old, and I've been working mainly with early stage space startups," he said.

Early stagers like [Boeing](#), [Motorola](#), and NASA.

"Often within the larger companies, they have divisions that are focused on spinoff technologies and setting up companies around those technologies," said Martin.

Pod Consulting also worked with satellite company ProtoStar, a genuine startup formed by former Hughes executives. Martin formerly worked as head of West Coast business development at Hughes and as manager of business development on NASA's International Space Station program for Boeing.

"The technology, the triple-junction cells, come out of the space program," said Martin.

The two main chip suppliers for the specialty cells are Boeing's [Spectrolab](#) unit and [Emcore](#). Emcore recently announced a record \$24 million, 105 megawatt order for its CPV cells from Australia's Green and Gold Energy (see [Emcore claims largest sale of CPV cells](#)).

Martin would not disclose how much funding Pod Generating has received from Calyon, but the Pod Consulting web site says the solar group is backed by over \$300 million in financing, with several strategic investors.

Martin said he's moving back to Sault Ste. Marie to run the new group, but the company isn't stopping there. Pod Generating plans to develop a series of solar facilities across Ontario and other parts of North America.

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