

# AMEREN

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Some 40-50 construction jobs are anticipated. Some \$50,000 is expected to be generated in annual property taxes, and diverse labor participation is set at 27 percent.

The center should be operational by early 2023.

The project is part of a long-term modernization plan, Mark said. Some \$55 million alone has been invested in East St. Louis in the last five years, including renovations to the utility's East St. Louis Operating Center in the 500 block of East Broadway.

Mark called the newest project a continuation of the utility's "promise to build a modern energy grid for the future."

The new center represents the first power-generation facility to be owned and operated by a state utility company in the last 25 years.

"This is the first of what we hope to be others in East St. Louis and Peoria," Mark said.

In the next year, Ameren will work with educators to develop a solar instructional plan that will allow students and others to learn more about the renewable energy industry.

"It's my goal that a student sitting right across the street and staring out the window will see this not as the vacant lot that it is today but an opportunity for their future," Mark said.

Building a project like this is not easy, especially in the current supply chain environment, Mark said.

## How it will work

Rod Hilburn said his colleagues will be on site frequently during construction and eventually monitor things more remotely. He is the manager of Ameren's Technology Applications Center, a testing facility built next to the University of Illinois in Champaign, created as part of the Energy Infrastructure Modernization Act in 2011.

An 8-foot high, decorative fence will surround the perimeter.

A control building will be placed on the solar grounds in East St. Louis that will allow for monitoring and security.

Plans call for installation of a 15-foot by 40-foot prefab unit. It will have controls, communications and monitoring, and electrical conductors. There will be room inside to accommodate visitors and tours.

Next to the control building will be a switchgear area.

"The switchboard is how we bring the electricity from the solar arrays and their inverters and into the box at 480 volts. The individual circuits



From left, Illinois state Sen. Chris Belt; East St. Louis Mayor Robert Eastern III; Richard Mark, chairman and president, Ameren Illinois; Teresa Haley, president of the Illinois branch of the NAACP; and St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern, break ground at the site of the new Ameren Illinois East St. Louis Solar Energy Center. IBJ photo/Dennis Grubaugh

(from each panel) come into this on the low side and combine together to a 4,000-amp breaker," Hilburn said.

A step-up transformer sends the electricity out for distribution as part of Ameren's existing 34,000-volt distribution system.

The solar panels are designed with photovoltaic cells. They produce electricity by converting sunlight to electricity.

Each of the 6,000 panels, with maximum sunlight, are designed to produce around 500 watts of DC, or direct current, like a battery provides (not like the alternating current associated with a home outlet). The electricity is grouped from each of the panels and wired in such way that the conductors that are routed through a solar inverter where the DC is changed to AC current. Much of the cabling associated with the project is routed through underground conduit.

To further understand the output, about 1,000 volts of DC become 480 volts of AC current in the conversion process.

"Basically, we'll end up with 2.5 megawatts of alternating current, is what the maximum design capabil-

ity is," Hilburn said. That power will service between 400 and 500 customers across a wide area.

Also speaking at the groundbreaking were state Sen. Christopher Belt, D-Swansea, St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern, and Illinois NAACP President Teresa Haley.

Belt was credited with getting the legislation through the General Assembly, which he said was not easy. Energy special interest groups outside of Downstate fought against the solar provisions.

"Sen. Belt stood up to these special interest groups. and I'll have to say he was very courageous. They were in his office, calling him, harassing him, trying to get him to take this project out of the legislation. He stood tall," Mark said.

Belt said his 57th Senate District has three of the poorest communities in the state — East St. Louis, Brooklyn and the former Centreville — and needs the type of project that Ameren is building.

"This is huge," Belt said. "This represents rebirth. Tax base, revenue. ... with good corporate citizens to lead the way."

## Ameren Transmission executive to be honored

Junior Achievement of Greater St. Louis announced that Shawn Schukar, chairman and president of Ameren Transmission, has been chosen to receive JA's most prestigious national award for volunteerism, the Gold Leadership Award.

He will be recognized at Junior Achievement's Business Hall of Fame event on Thursday, May 19, with the 2021 recipient, Dr. Kelvin Adams, presenting the award.

The Gold Leadership Award honors volunteer excellence and is presented in recognition of inspired leadership in supporting and expanding JA's student impact, resources and community mindedness during the 2020-2021 school year. Schukar is the 10th local leader to be recognized for this national award since it was established in 1978.

Schukar has served as a local Junior Achievement board member since 2010, is chair of the JA Bowl-A-Thon and Play4JA Event committees, and a leader on the JA Executive Committee.

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