



THE NEW TRI-STATE DEFENDER

Clean energy is on the rise, providing good jobs in Memphis and across Tennessee

Clean energy jobs represent a path out of poverty for lower-wage earners looking to make a change for the better.

Jimmie Tucker, Special to The New Tri-State Defender | 9/5/2015, 12:59 p.m.



Jimmie Tucker

Clean energy is revitalizing communities and improving lives across our state, and Memphis is no exception. Clean energy jobs – which include trades such as installation of solar panels and energy efficient windows and HVAC equipment, in addition to manufacturing, accounting, management and more – represent not only a promising way to reduce unemployment, but also a path out of poverty for lower-wage earners looking to make a change for the better.

According to research by Environmental Entrepreneurs, clean energy jobs across the country provide wages that are 13 percent higher than the median U.S. wage. By adding higher-paying jobs, the clean energy industry is helping to improve our local economy, which benefits all Memphians.

And according to new reports, clean energy is a growth industry. The recently released Tennessee Clean Energy Industry Assessment report shows there are currently 44,269 jobs in Tennessee's clean energy industry. That figure is set to increase significantly in the coming months and years, as clean energy employment is on the rise in Tennessee. With a growth rate of 6.3 percent in the last year, clean energy job growth far surpassed the 2.2 percent overall increase in employment statewide.

As one of the founding principals of Self + Tucker Architects (STA), I know first-hand how clean energy can create opportunities for economic development and job growth here in Memphis. STA has chosen to focus on green buildings because we believe each building we design should enhance the quality of life for its occupants and enrich the architectural fabric in the community in which it's located. Our focus on sustainable design is essential to achieving those aspirations. By integrating energy efficiency and renewable energy into

the places where we work, live, play and pray, we can save money on utility bills, clean up the air, improve public health and beautify our city, all while growing the economy and creating good jobs.

Clean energy represents a vital opportunity to breathe new life and purpose into old and even abandoned buildings through cost-effective upgrades to the way they use energy. For example, STA is currently working on the revitalization of the historic but long-vacant Universal Life Insurance Building at the corner of Danny Thomas Boulevard and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. When the project is complete, it will feature numerous clean energy upgrades, including a green roof and a large parking lot solar canopy. In addition, the project will include a local clean energy job-training program that will prepare local workers with the skills they need as the clean energy industry continues to grow in greater Memphis.

Just last month, Clean Line Energy Partners LLC announced that the company Sediver is planning to build a 70-employee factory in West Memphis to make parts for the proposed Clean Line wind energy transmission project, which would terminate in Memphis and is currently being considered for approval by the U.S. Department of Energy.

As our country implements more policies that support clean energy, such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan, clean energy job growth will continue ramping up in Tennessee and across the nation. The Clean Power Plan is expected to create 274,000 new jobs in the energy efficiency sector alone, which could save American households and businesses \$37.4 billion on their electricity bills by 2020.

One important piece of the Clean Power Plan is the Clean Energy Incentive Program, which would incentivize investment in renewable energy and low-income energy efficiency programs in 2020 and 2021. This program would help jumpstart investment into these clean energy resources two years prior to when states must begin complying with the plan in 2022. This piece of the Clean Power Plan could benefit our city immensely, given that there are a lot of opportunities to improve energy efficiency programs and savings for low-income communities in Memphis. Additionally, due to the huge potential for solar growth in Memphis, our city could use this program to create credits for our state to use for Clean Power Plan compliance.

Clean energy is benefiting Memphians today, and it will help to build the Memphis of tomorrow. By voicing our support for the growing clean energy economy, we can make sure that our city and our state secure the job growth and many other benefits we stand to gain.

(Jimmie Tucker is one of the founding principals of Self + Tucker Architects.)

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