

# FINANCE & COMMERCE

## Slumberland looks to soak up the sun

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Tags: [Ecos Energy](#), [Geronimo Energy](#), [Green Tech Media Research](#), [Hunt Electric](#), [Kenny Larson](#), [Little Canada](#), [Minnesota Renewable Energy Society](#), [Nathan B. Franzen](#), [Slumberland Furniture](#), [solar energy](#), [solar panels](#), [solar power](#), [Solar Rewards](#), [Xcel Energy](#)



Solar panels for Slumberland Furniture's 25,000-square-foot Roseville store were installed in September as part of the Little Canada-based retailer's green initiatives in the metro area. (Submitted photo)

The electricity used in 10 [Slumberland Furniture](#) properties in the Twin Cities area soon will be powered in part by solar energy.

The retailer will put solar panels on eight stores, a warehouse and its Little Canada corporate office. Edina-based [Geronimo Energy](#) developed the project, which involves installing solar panels capable of producing 40 kilowatts of electricity on each of the buildings, according to Nathan B. Franzen, Geronimo's solar director.

"The idea was brought to us by Geronimo, which saw this as a great opportunity because of the size of our stores and the great geographic coverage we have that allows for multiple locations for solar — not just a single location," said Slumberland President Kenny Larson. "It's a great way for us to participate in solar and have it complement our other green initiatives."

The average Slumberland store runs from 35,000 to 40,000 square feet, with the Roseville location being the smallest at 25,000 square feet, said Larson. The solar panels will take up roughly 5,000 square feet of space per roof, according to Franzen.

Slumberland qualified for Minneapolis-based Xcel Energy's Solar Rewards' program and will receive a 30 percent federal tax credit off the cost of the project, Larson said.

Although neither Larson nor Franzen would reveal the cost, a report by San Francisco-based Green Tech Media Research puts the current cost at roughly \$4 per watt for nonresidential solar projects. Using that figure, the total cost of the 40,000-watt Slumberland project is likely around \$1.6 million.

“Without the federal tax credits and Xcel Energy’s participation, the project would not be viable,” said Larson. “We’re thinking the payback will be six-and-a-half years. It’s a sizeable investment.”

The project began with an installation at the Roseville store in September and continued in October on stores in Bloomington, Maple Grove, Fridley, Owatonna, St. Paul and Woodbury. The installation of panels on all stores will be completed within a month, he said.

The panels will collectively produce 400 kilowatts of electricity and provide 20 percent of the energy needs of each property, Franzen said. The project is expected to remove the equivalent of 815,000 pounds of carbon emissions annually.

Local solar advocates are impressed by the company’s investment. “I think the project shows the economic value that solar can provide a company in the long term and how it will improve the reputation of an already environmentally conscious company,” said Laura Burrington, managing director of the Minneapolis-based Minnesota Renewable Energy Society. “We’re encouraging people to be consumers of companies that are purchasing solar — so I guess we’ll be saying to everyone, ‘go buy a mattress.’”

St. Paul-based Hunt Electric is installing the solar panels, made in China, but it’s using American-manufactured parts such as racks and inverters, Franzen said. Although Geronimo is sensitive to concerns about solar panels built in China, he said they represent just 22 percent of the project’s cost, with the majority of the budget being spent on labor, U.S. products and permitting.

Inverters will transfer electricity generated by the panels into the stores and on to the electric grid, Franzen said. Xcel will credit Slumberland for energy sent to the grid, he added.

The project would not have worked if only one store had been involved. “Conformity of installations was the key to making this project work economically,” Franzen said. “Having us doing more rooftops makes a big difference on costs. There was a substantial savings in aggregating them all into one project.”

Geronimo has been largely known for managing and overseeing large scale wind projects, but it has built a strong business developing large solar projects for businesses and universities over the past few years. While Geronimo still develops wind projects, it has added solar “because the economics of it have changed,” Franzen said. “Wind is still valuable. The facts of solar, though, have changed so dramatically.”

In 2009, Franzen, working with Best Power, installed the second-largest solar project in the state at St. John's University, he said, a project just recently surpassed by Minneapolis-based Ecos Energy's 10-acre [Slayton](#) development.

The 1,820 panels of the 3.9-acre St. John's project produce 575,000 kilowatt hours annually, or on average 4 percent of the university's yearly energy needs. The cost was \$7 per watt of electricity produced. Now solar is \$2 or less a watt for "large scale" utility project of 5 megawatts or more, Franzen said.

The solar power project is part of Slumberland's growing sustainability program, said Larson. Slumberland also retrofit lighting in many of its more than 125 stores and has a large recycling effort that includes cardboard, Styrofoam and plastic.

Slumberland also will shred old mattresses when customers buy new ones, reducing substantially the amount of material going to landfills, he said.

Whether Slumberland rolls out the program to its other stores remains to be seen. The retailer would consider adding more solar installations if a financial arrangement could be developed that is similar to the current project, he said.

Employees have been told about the project through the company's intranet. "I've gotten all kinds of feedback from employees who feel it's a great way to be good citizens," Larson reported.