

Onetime eyesore now giant solar station

BY SANDRA GUY

sguy@suntimes.com

As Exelon celebrated completion of the nation's largest urban solar-power plant, the next-door neighbors in West Pullman celebrated a new life for a former polluted industrial site.

The plant began operating in December, with all 32,292 panels tested and in service in March, and final site work just completed.

"The solar plant has upgraded this community," said Dannese Flennoy, secretary for the Victory Heights-Maple Park Community Advisory Council, the neighborhood group that worked with politicians and Exelon to see the solar plant to fruition.

The former International Harvester property — now the solar plant — had become an eyesore, a health hazard and a dumping ground for other communities' old tires and other debris.

"There should be some direct benefit to the people in this community, both in our utility bills and in going green," said John Chenier, a 36-year resident and co-chairman of the advisory council.

R.C. Hardy Jr., also a 36-year resident, said the neighborhood hopes to see one or two homes outfitted with a rooftop solar panel as part of a pilot program, and intends to



Exelon has completed its \$60 million solar panel project that began operation in December at 1201 W. 120th St. in West Pullman. | JOHN J. KIM-SUN-TIMES

work to upgrade other vacant sites.

"We want to get the whole community to go green," Hardy said.

He said neighbors now want to see a former paint company industrial site just east of the solar plant and a former steel plant site on 122nd Street transformed, too.

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SOLAR FACTS

- Cost: \$60 million.
- 7 full-time employees of site operator SunPower, a solar company based in San Jose, Calif.
- Site owner: Exelon, the parent company of ComEd.
- 41 acres that had been vacant for more than 30 years.

- 32,292 solar panels can power 1,500 homes with more than 14,000 megawatt-hours of electricity a year.
- 7,300 steel piers sourced from Fabricating & Welding Corp., located one mile from the solar plant.
- Displaces 31.2 million pounds of greenhouse gas emissions a year, equivalent to taking 2,500 cars off the road.