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Commerce RI, Office of Energy Resources and Energy Non-Profit SmartPower Partner to Lower Costs of Solar Power in Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (Commerce RI), the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER) and non-profit marketing firm SmartPower today announced the launch of Solarize Rhode Island, a municipal-based program aimed at providing opportunities for installation of rooftop solar energy at lower costs.

The program will be piloted over the next nine months in three municipalities across Rhode Island - North Smithfield, Tiverton, and Little Compton - all of whom voted in favor of participation at Town Council meetings throughout August.

Based on a successful model run in more than 90 cities and towns in Connecticut and Massachusetts installing more than 16 MW of capacity, Solarize is a municipal-based program aimed at reducing the costs of installing rooftop solar energy. Solarize relies on a few key components to reduce solar installation costs, including: a) a competitively-selected installer in each town; b) a tiered pricing system and time-limited offer to incentivize greater participation; and c) community-based marketing.

"Through this partnership, we'll be able to work with municipalities to offer solar installations at lower costs, while helping to expand the renewable energy sector as a growing source of jobs and economic activity in Rhode Island," said Marcel A. Valois, Executive Director of Commerce RI. "With greater adoption of solar energy, we hope to leverage the Solarize program to continue to provide Commerce RI's Renewable Energy Fund resources to support more renewable energy projects around the state."

"We are so pleased to be offering this innovative, yet proven program in Rhode Island" noted Dr. Marion Gold, Commissioner of the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources "Rooftop solar is a vital piece of Rhode Island's energy vision, and this program will help us achieve those goals while lowering overall system costs, supporting municipalities and the growing renewable energy professional industry in the state."

The initial pilot will run in two phases, with North Smithfield kicking off Phase I in fall 2014. Phase II in Little Compton and Tiverton, will formally begin after the New Year. The partnership will determine whether and how to expand the program to more municipalities after this round is completed in summer 2015.

"What a perfect way to celebrate the end of summer - with the launch of Solarize, Rhode Island," said Brian F. Keane, President of SmartPower. "Solar just makes sense for Rhode Island, and we're excited to work in partnership with the Office of Energy Resources, Commerce RI and the John Merck Fund to bring Solarize to the Ocean State."

Commerce RI and OER will jointly administer the program and work with SmartPower to manage projects within the pilot municipalities. SmartPower has marketing and community engagement expertise, so they will help to create and manage websites, collateral and generally assist in marketing the programs. Commerce RI and OER will help municipalities select installers through a competitive bidding process, assist with promoting the Solarize program and provide ongoing support for the program in each of the three pilot communities.

About Commerce RI Commerce RI is the official economic development organization for the State of Rhode Island. Commerce RI's mission is to work with public, private and non-profit partners to create the conditions for businesses in all sectors to thrive and to improve the quality of life for our citizens by promoting the State's long-term economic health and prosperity. Commerce RI manages the State's Renewable Energy Fund which provides grants and loans for renewable energy projects with the potential to make electricity in a cleaner, more sustainable manner, while stimulating job growth in the green technology and energy sectors of Rhode Island's economy. www.commerceri.com

About Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources The Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER) is the lead state agency on energy policy and programs. OER's mission is to lead Rhode Island to a secure, cost-effective, and sustainable energy future. OER works closely with private and public stakeholders to increase the reliability and security of our energy supply, reduce energy costs and mitigate against price volatility, and improve environmental quality. www.energy.ri.gov

About SmartPower SmartPower is the nation's leading non-profit marketing firm dedicated to promoting clean, renewable energy and energy efficiency. SmartPower's mission is to help Americans make smart energy choices by creating on-the-ground campaigns that engage the public and generate measurable energy actions. www.smartpower.org

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