

Solar Helps Independent Businesses Achieve ESG Goals

SunVest Solar LLC partners with three Illinois manufacturing companies to deliver projects ranging from 600 kW to 1,200 kW



Companies set Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) goals with the intention of creating a sustainable future for themselves and the greater community. For independent family-owned businesses that have thrived through multiple generations, ESG is another way to be a transparent employer and a responsible corporate citizen.

SunVest Solar LLC recently worked with three Illinois manufacturers that have been pillars in their communities for 100 years – Fellowes Brands, The Suter Company, and Radio Flyer. Each was focused on ESG metrics that would improve energy efficiency in their manufacturing facilities and thus, reduce the carbon footprint of their products. Solar power was a clear solution because of the expansive rooftop space available and the significant financial incentives.

The projects – ranging from 600 kW to 1,200 kW rooftop installations – were not small. They needed to generate as much renewable electricity as possible in order to reduce their dependence on the utility as much as possible. Each company needed a solar developer partner that was willing to work through the complexities of a project with them, guide them through the design and development process, and, in the end, have a PV system that produced the metrics they were working toward. Here's how we did it.

Long-term Partnerships

Celebrating its 105th year under the private ownership and executive leadership of the Fellowes family, Fellowes Brands is a global leader of broad-based business solutions that help professionals be their best and feel their best. Headquartered in Itasca, Illinois, USA, Fellowes Brands operates from 24 locations across the globe.

A team of Employee Champions at the Global Head Office in Itasca, Illinois, led the charge for the Fellowes renewable energy initiative, which was vetted and closely cared for over the course of four years. They reviewed more than 30 solar developer companies across a 2-year period to ensure they selected the partner that would be best to work with in the long-term. Once SunVest was selected, the project took two more years as the Employee Champions and Executive Champions worked with SunVest to ensure every detail was covered.



The system went live in January 2020. The installed capacity of 1,020 kW is estimated to generate 1,020,000 kWh of renewable electricity each year. In its first full two years, the system has averaged 96.7% of its estimated performance. In addition to saving on utility bills, thanks to incentives, the expected payback period is 3 years.

Flexibility and Scalability

The Suter Company has manufactured prepared food products since 1925. After three generations of family ownership the company is now an employee owned. Suter's vision is to Enrich Lives for Generations, which is reflected in their employee care, charitable, and environmental initiatives.

This project demonstrated how flexible solar is – it can be moved and shifted if the needs of the business change in the future. Mid-way through the installation, after the modules were installed on multiple roofs, the Suter Company needed to move forward with building an addition. SunVest moved some modules and removed others in order to make room for where the addition's roof joined with the rest of the facility. We did this fairly easily and then reconfigured the inverter wiring, providing clear access to the roof addition from the other main roofs.



The system went live in February 2020 with an installed capacity of 675 kW. It is estimated to generate 810,000 kWh of renewable electricity per year. Over two years, the system has averaged 97.5% of its estimated performance.

Industry Knowledge

Radio Flyer, the iconic manufacturer of wagons, electric bikes, scooters, and more is a family-owned toy company well on its way to achieving a goal of 100% carbon-free manufacturing and materials. The 105-year-old company is also working toward a goal of 100% renewable electricity across global operations as part of its involvement with RE100, a worldwide campaign by corporate leaders to achieve 100% renewable energy.



A SunVest designed, installed, and helps maintain a 606-kW system. There were several challenges for this project. First, in order to provide Radio Flyer with the desired amount of solar power, arrays had to be distributed across four roof tops, but all inverters had to be placed in a central location near the facility's main distribution panel. Second, the system had to meet strict requirements from the City of Chicago, including a Rapid Shut Down capability. All challenges were addressed through SunVest's extensive experience in solar power and our breadth of knowledge of the various industry technology

platforms. Radio Flyer's PV system went live in May 2020. It has achieved 97% of its performance goal in PV Watts. The system not only has the potential to produce 737,000 kWh of renewable electricity every year – offsetting more than half of the Chicago headquarters' electricity usage – but it will save Radio Flyer \$50,000 in utility bills annually and pay for itself within 2.4 years. Radio Flyer plans reinvest the funds into more sustainability initiatives that further improve operations, employee programs, and

A Legacy of Clean Energy

ESG helps companies take a holistic view on the impact they have on their employees, the environment, and the community, improve them, and communicate those improvements. Solar energy helps companies meet ESG renewable energy goals while leaving a lasting legacy.