

All-Star Game a solar showcase for Arizona

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As many of us know from personal experience, there's nothing like visitors to spur home-improvement projects.

Thank goodness for the All-Star Game next month.

Phoenix has two new projects to show off to fans and the media. Chase Field has added a solar pavilion, providing much-needed shade. And a solar-powered cooling station is being installed at the Washington Street Metro light-rail stop that serves the ballpark.

The initiatives are timely combinations of innovation and comfort.

"When visitors come to the Valley, they should come away with an impression that we're a city that manages living in the desert well," said Dan Wool, spokesman for Arizona Public Service.

APS has been working in partnership with the Diamondbacks on a number of "green" measures at Chase Field. The APS Solar Pavilion was a natural next step.

The solar array and the way it's incorporated into the ballpark is "unique to Major League Baseball," Wool said. But solar and sports won't be unique in Phoenix. By the time the next season starts for the Suns, US Airways Center will have solar structures on top. (Given the team's name, the only surprise is that it didn't happen earlier.)

The \$1 million solar pavilion, which APS paid

for, is less important for the power it puts into the grid (enough for six to eight homes) than for its potential to educate customers about renewable energy and efficiency.

And it's hugely important for shade. The plaza at Chase Field becomes a blast furnace in summer. The pavilion not only shields fans, it also reduces the amount of heat that the pavement absorbs and then radiates at night - reducing the "urban heat island" effect, which keeps the city from cooling off after the sun goes down.

This is the kind of shading we need around the Valley. The Diamondbacks are looking at whether to install more at the ballpark. The answer should be yes.

The cooling setup at the Metro stop is more of a one-of-a-kind project. City officials say it was inspired by a system Mayor Phil Gordon saw in Dubai.

When passengers get hot waiting at the Washington stop, they'll be able to push a button to get an individual stream of cool air. The system will run on solar power and tap into the existing water-chilled air-conditioning system that serves 34 major

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downtown buildings.

NRG Energy, which runs that huge AC network, will cover the cost of building and operating the Metro cooling system, which will open before the All-Star Game. The company already has some explanatory signs up, smart publicity that will build public awareness of what solar technology can do.

The project is the first to use solar power along the Metro light-rail system and should open the door to other possibilities. Unfortunately, this version of a personal cooling system is only possible downtown, where the larger connection is available.

Now Metro needs to rise to the challenge of keeping waiting passengers comfortable along the rest of the route.

With national attention focused on Arizona during the All-Star Game, the APS Solar Pavilion and the Metro cooling station are great chances to promote our state's potential in solar power and sustainable living in a hot climate.

We shouldn't lose the momentum after our guests leave.

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