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Discovery Place Branches Out with New Solar Trees

(Charlotte, NC) - Charlotte's skyline took new shape over the weekend as Discovery Place installed two colorful, sculptural solar energy systems on the top of its Carol Grotnes Belk Parking Complex. Each standing 20 feet in height, the "solar trees" are a highly visible component of a larger educational initiative featuring information about new and established energy sources. The trees will be used to power an electric vehicle charging station located on level three of the parking deck and will offset energy use in the Museum's adjacent Education building.

"We chose a bold and unconventional-looking system that will intrigue passersby and make a conspicuous statement about the developing landscape of renewable energy," said John Mackay, president and CEO of Discovery Place, Inc. "Our hope is that visitors will learn more about how solar energy fits into a portfolio of different sustainable energy sources."

Once fully installed, the solar trees will be visible for blocks around the Museum as well as from an indoor learning kiosk located inside Discovery Place's Charlotte Observer IMAX Dome Theatre lobby. Through live energy data and educational videos on a touch-screen display, Museum visitors will be able to get real-time information about the electrical output of the system. They will discover the impacts of the seasons, clouds and shadows, angle of sunlight and other factors related to solar energy. Intended as an educational experience, the solar system has a modest capacity, but will reduce pollution by the equivalent of 500 gallons of gasoline burned, and generate about half of the electricity consumed by a typical Charlotte residence.

Contributors to the project include some of the most sophisticated energy and solar design firms in the state. Southern Energy Management, the largest solar integrator in the Southeast, served as the primary contractor at the Museum, and Spotlight Solar, a North Carolina firm offering aesthetically attractive solar systems designed for visible locations, manufactured the trees. Bosch Solar donated the solar panels needed for the trees. The City of Charlotte provided grant funding and technical support and will provide public outreach through its Power2Charlotte energy efficiency and conservation awareness program.

"We are thrilled to bring this unique system to Discovery Place and to the people of Charlotte," said Bob Kingery, CEO of Southern Energy Management. "We've installed solar around the southeastern US for the last 10 years, and this is the most distinctive installation to date."

"Spotlight Solar structures are designed to make solar energy more visible and attractive," said Craig Merrigan, CEO of Spotlight Solar. "We hope to inspire more people to adopt renewable energy."

"The City is pleased to continue its long-standing partnership with Discovery Place by providing grant funding for this project, designed to broaden the community's understanding about the value of energy conservation and alternative ways to generate power," added David Smith, project manager for the City of Charlotte. "The project is also an extension of the City's Power2Charlotte campaign to raise awareness of projects funded by a grant from the US Department of Energy."

Installation of the solar trees began at 6:00 am. on Sunday, February 26 on level three of the Carol Grotnes Belk Parking Complex located at the corner of Church and Sixth Streets and continues today. Once the solar trees have been placed, the panels will be installed and electricity generation should begin in March once inspections are completed.

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Funded by a grant from the US Department of Energy, The Power2 Charlotte campaign is one of 17 City of Charlotte projects to receive funding through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program, part of the American Resource and Recovery Act. To learn more about Charlotte's energy strategy, visit the city's economic recovery web site at www.Power2Charlotte.com