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**LATE
WEEK**

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THE PRINCETON PACKET

SOLUTIONS

Huck Fairman

David Crane and NRG Energy acting globally

One of the lessons coming out of the recent recession is the benefit of efficiency and lowering costs. Local companies of all sizes, as well as individuals and institutions have been seeking ways to achieve cost reductions, and many have found significant savings are possible by adopting new energy technologies. Because these technologies can also reduce CO2 emissions, and help make this country more energy-efficient, self-sufficient and sustainable, everybody wins. Consensus acknowledges

that there is no one solution to reach these goals, but a Princeton-based company, NRG Energy, led by its dynamic president, David Crane, is energetically moving in several directions at once to respond to energy issues and the new technologies.

A Princeton graduate and Lawrenceville resident, Crane has built NRG Energy into a Fortune 500 company that has its headquarters just across Route 1. Locally, it is providing "high-efficiency energy services" for the new Princeton Hospital in Plainsboro. Deep in the heart of Texas, of all places, it is establishing a network of electric charging stations, eVgo, for electric cars. As the largest solar developer in the nation, it is expanding the reach of this technology along the East Coast, across the Southwest and even to Haiti. In addition, the company has four wind farms in Texas and natural gas projects in the Northeast. Crane sees natural gas as a "bridge fuel" until cleaner fuels are fully developed.

NRG's most visible solar project will be providing solar power for some of the NFL's stadiums. This came about when it acquired the Texas power company, Reliant Energy, and bought itself entrée to the National Football League's 32 teams, as Reliant had been a stadium sponsor. The NFL, in part very much a business, has been keenly aware of its public image and was thus eager to participate, and indeed become a leader in sustainability and the national energy transformation.

Crane was able to contract with the owners of Giants-Jets MetLife Stadium, the Washington Redskins' FedEx Field, and the Patriot's Gillette Stadium to provide substantial portions of their power needs through solar power. These solar installations will be ready by the 2012 season.

At Washington's FedEx Field, NRG's 8,000 solar panels, and its solar 'Slingshot Sammy' sculpture, can provide 20 percent of the stadium's power needs on game day and 100 percent on other

days, depending on weather. Although the stadium will need to remain on the grid, the owners can expect to see power savings equivalent to that used by 300 DC Metro-area homes, while saving the emission into the atmosphere of 1,780 metric tons of CO2 annually.

And, Crane points out, the economic benefits of this technology are only increasing with the dramatically falling cost of solar hardware. The overall costs can decline further, he adds, if the "soft costs," such as permitting and other requirements can also be brought down.

There are two additional benefits to these large-scale, stadium installations.

Because they become significant power generators themselves, producing more power than they often need, they can send their excess electricity back to the grid, providing the owners with added economic benefit, and providing their regional grids with extra electricity, most critically during the hot summer weather when utility companies strain to meet demand.

Finally, beyond the immediate economic benefits, these high-visibility stadium installations should help spread the word about the energy revolution. Just how important this transformation is can be understood by recognizing that the energy expended in buildings amounts to, in some cities, 80 percent of all energy used.

At the same time that Crane has brought NRG to its leading position in energy development and innovation, he has helped fund, design and install local solar power generation in Haiti, working with Bill Clinton and his Clinton Global Initiative.

Fortunately, Crane and the people at NRG are forging ahead toward the needed energy transformation that will benefit us economically and environmentally.