

# GOVERNOR HAILS ENERGY-EFFICIENT BUILDING



San Leandro, CA

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The governor of California came to town to see where the next generation of electricians will train at a new-age building in San Leandro that produces as much electricity as it uses.

“This is big,” said governor Jerry Brown who came to San Leandro last Thursday for the ceremony.

The swirling white windmills tower over the Zero Net Energy Center at 14600 Catalina St. in the industrial zone. The building was just remodeled to make it years ahead in energy conservation. It’s covered with gleaming solar panels.

Over the course of a year, the building will produce as much electricity as it consumes, say the electrical workers and contractors on hand for the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

This new building isn’t some way out idea. It’s practical and sensible, Brown said.

“This is mainstream, but it’s bold,” Brown said. “We have one building here. Now we need thousands of these buildings...Let’s put more people to work at good wages taking care of things.”

Brown’s speech was the grand finale after a dozen speakers from trade unions, contractor organizations, along with Congresswoman Barbara Lee, State Senator Ellen Corbett and Mayor Stephen Cassidy.



“Walking in here, it looks like something from *The Jetsons*, Corbett said. “This is really something to be proud of.”

The training center houses classrooms and workshops full of electrical equipment, so apprentices can learn every facet of the job. The building remodeling is a collaboration between the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 595 and the Northern California chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA).

The speakers pointed out that the building reduces carbon emissions by 175 tons a year, and that it’s ahead of President Obama’s goal of 20 percent better energy efficiency in commercial buildings by the end of the decade.

“The future is being created today in California,” said Mayor Stephen Cassidy. “In San Leandro we are transforming our city into a center of innovation.”

All the speeches gave a rosy picture, but the promises of a green energy future haven't all panned out yet.

San Leandro has been touting its "Lit San Leandro" high-speed fiber-optic loop for some time now, which is supposed to bring an influx of high-tech companies to town. But just around the corner from the ribbon cutting on Farallon Drive are several large, modern industrial buildings standing empty behind real estate signs.

Public figures came to the ribbon cutting to be associated with a successful project, maybe because there hasn't been too much to brag about lately – following Solyndra, the Bay Bridge nightmare, the high-speed train to Nowhereville, and the planned Warriors monstrosity that looks more like a pre-1960 fill-the-bay project.

But as Brown said, there are going to be failures along the path to success.

"When you build things it doesn't always work out right away," Brown said.

The governor recalled a big publicity event about 40 years ago when BART was about to open and they assembled the press and all the cameras at the Fremont station and the new, gleaming BART train rolled in and didn't stop. It rolled right off the end of the tracks.

"Stuff happens," Brown said. "We have a thing called a wood-chip gasifier in Sacramento and that damn thing still doesn't work. But you have to think long term. I think we have to get back to basics."

Brown and other speakers repeated the theme of conservation in energy and economics.

Classes for electrical apprentices will move from their current building on Alvarado Street to the Zero Net Energy Center in August for the fall semester.

Apprentices work during the day and take classes two nights a week for a couple of hours, said instructor Les Bridge.

Tuition is free once an apprentice is indentured into the 5-year program. And right now, the program has 100 percent employment, all the apprentices are working full time, Bridge said.

Skylights lit the rooms on the sunny afternoon last week, as people toured the building after the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"It's brighter and more modern," said electrical apprentice Sherrie Tullsen-Chin, who will be taking classes at the center. "The rooms of the building are dedicated to sustainable energy. I feel like the nation is watching us."