

DPR Construction Completes Georgia's First Solar Cell Manufacturing Facility For Suniva

In 16 Weeks, DPR Converts Norcross Warehouse Into Facility For Clean Energy Production

NORCROSS, December 15, 2008 – DPR Construction, one of the nation's leading technical builders serving the advanced technology, life sciences and healthcare markets, celebrated the completion of Georgia's first solar cell manufacturing facility at the building's Dec. 11 grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony. DPR managed the design/build services of the new Norcross facility for Suniva, a high-efficiency clean energy solar cell manufacturer. DPR completed the facility's 30,000sq.-ft. Photovoltaic cell production space and 15,000 sq.ft. of office space in four months.

The building team began work on the high-tech project July 1, and in a period of 16 weeks, converted an empty warehouse into a fully operational facility. Suniva began production of solar cells while DPR was still in the final stages of construction, and produced the facility's first solar cell Oct. 23, 2008 — just 115 days after DPR began work on the project.

“Our team worked in two shifts for a total of 18 hours each day, six days a week, to meet the project's strict schedule,” said Andy Andres, regional manager for DPR. “It takes an incredibly dynamic group to build such a complex project in record time, and we're proud to have met the ambitious challenge that Suniva presented us.”

DPR managed the design and construction of the facility's high-tech structures, including such advanced elements as high-purity water systems, on-site waste treatment systems, chemical delivery systems, chemical bunker and high-purity piping. To build the complex systems, DPR used unique materials, including epoxy flooring coatings, Teflon-lined stainless-steel ductwork and double-contained welded polypropylene piping.

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Constructing the project's specialized systems presented several challenges, including last minute changes to duct work requested by insurers, nonspecific drawings of laboratory equipment and having to coordinate intricate installation within a small space — all while meeting the project's tight schedule.

“It was like a ballet because we had to dance around each other. Tools were coming in the door and we were still putting up the ceiling,” said Jack Poindexter, project manager for DPR. “But when you're moving that fast, the schedule has zero flexibility and you have to work together as a team to get the job done.”

Another important element of the project's success was DPR's design/build partnership with architecture firm Perkins+Will. Because the laboratory's foreign-made equipment required precise coordination between the design and build teams, DPR worked closely with project architect Rob Noma of Perkins+Will to solve problems and ensure they successfully adapted the plans into reality. “I've never had a better architect-contractor relationship, and that made the difference,” Poindexter said. “This project was a one-of-a-kind office and lab facility, so having the right team was crucial.”

Because Suniva's facility is one of only a handful of solar manufacturing facilities in the U.S. and the first of its kind in the region, DPR had no prior experience building a solar energy facility. However, the building team's experience with constructing similar high-tech facilities, such microelectronic manufacturing facilities for some of the world's leading companies, enabled them to successfully break new ground.

“As a builder of highly technical projects, we're often presented with unique situations and building facilities that have never been built before under tight deadlines,” said Andres.

“Facilities such as Suniva's are right in our ‘sweet spot’ and are just the type of challenging projects we love to build. We hope this facility will spur further growth of Georgia's clean energy community.”