



Mon Valley Education Consortium

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Michelle Malito, standing left, and Marlene Arth of Comet Way's computer tech support division guide TFIM: Student Project advisors through the various aspects of the new www.thefutureismine.com website that will figure prominently in the work of the Student Project teams this school term.



TFIM: Student Project advisors gear up for full year of activities

With the start of a new school term, advisors for the TFIM: Student Projects in 22 schools across the region began working with their student teams to come up with career awareness and exploration activities that encourage thoughtful consideration of "real-world" options.

The 28 advisors spent a full day getting up to speed for the beginning of the second year of this in-school component of the MVEC initiative, The Future Is Mine. "Veteran" advisors shared their success stories and best strategies for engaging students with those who just joined the program this year.

TFIM Project Director Aimee D. LeFevers said the student teams are expected to complete, in the course of the school year, a peer-to-peer project within the high school, a peer-to-younger peer project within the district, and an individual project. They also will have a role in the annual Student Leadership Conference, scheduled for April 27-28, 2006.

With the debut of the new www.thefutureismine.com website (see story below), teams also will be responsible for creating a page on the site for their high school and then keeping it current with news of their TFIM: Student Project activities.

"All projects are initiated, driven and executed by students," LeFevers noted. "The goal is to link meaningful opportunities to explore future options with experiences that encourage self-discovery."

www.thefutureismine.com

New TFIM website: real world, real cool!

It's hard to describe a website in words. After all, they're meant to be seen.

And that's the goal of a new site – www.thefutureismine.com – that's taking shape as a result of an ongoing relationship between the Consortium and PSEA and a new partner, FutureConnect.

The hope is that the new site will be a valuable resource for teachers – and students – searching for authentic, "real-world" career education options and experiences. Real world and real cool!

The site has something for everyone: teachers, students, parents.

It draws on the extensive expertise of educators in Pennsylvania's public schools for an "authentic instruction" component. Here, teachers will be able to find tested lesson plans that address career exploration, related Act 48 opportunities and grant advisories (See Page 3 for more on authentic instruction).

Students pondering what life *really* is like after high school can research careers, touch base with other teens via a moderated message board, and swap ideas for the kinds of student-initiated career awareness activities already taking place in the TFIM: Student Project component of The Future Is Mine.

A student wondering, "Why do I need to learn chemistry?" will be able to reach out through the website and talk with working professionals – like a chef who knows just how chemistry plays out in work in

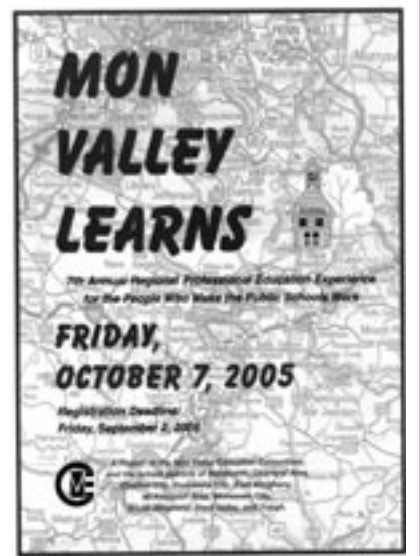
the kitchen. This "Who Can I Contact in My Community?" feature is just one of the appealing pages in the student section of the website. Career statistics (like salaries, benefits, and employment projections), "Ask the Graduate," and volunteer opportunities also will be part of thefutureismine.com.

The section for parents will include pertinent information on education options and links to sites that can help them help their children prepare for graduation and the next important steps in their lives.

Background information on The Future Is Mine, as well as descriptions of TFIM: Student Projects – all of which can be replicated – will be on the new site, too. "Each high school involved in the Student Project component will have its own page on the site," said LeFevers.

Corporate partners and regional employers LANXESS, Educational Management, Ameriserv Financial, Waste Management, and Nutrition, Inc., are providing underwriting for the site.

LeFevers said: "Our message to young people, through The Future Is Mine, has always been: 'It's your future. You own it. Now, what do you want to own?' The new website is a tool to help them figure that out."



7TH ANNUAL MON VALLEY LEARNS OCT. 7

Another edition of Mon Valley Learns will roll out Friday, Oct. 7, with more than 1,500 educators meeting to exchange best practices in 96 sessions and workshops.

This regional activity, begun by the Consortium on a much smaller scale seven years ago, capitalizes on the talent and expertise in place in the schools of the Mon Valley. This year's offerings present a chance to learn indoors or outdoors, in a classroom or a cemetery or a steel mill.

Ten districts are participating this year. Brochures are in all the schools and registration forms were due Friday, Sept. 9.



2005

Great Idea Grant
Fall Round Deadline
October 7

Mon Valley Learns 2005
October 7

Power Reading
on the River
Signup Deadline
October 14



2006

Great Idea Grant
Spring Round Deadline
February 3

For the Love of Books
February 11-19
Borders Books & Music
Stores

MVEC Annual
Leadership Retreat
March 24-25
Four Points Sheraton
Greensburg

Mon Valley Reads Week
April 24-28

TFIM Student Leadership
Conference
April 27-28
Pittsburgh Marriott
City Center

POWER READING ON THE RIVER KICKS OFF WITH D.E.A.R. SIGNUP



The Mon Valley Education Consortium once again is gearing up for its annual Power Reading on the River campaign.

As in past years, this program has two components. The first is a monthly Drop Everything And Read observance, a period of sustained silent reading that encourages the habit of reading. The second component is Mon Valley Reads, a regional celebration of literacy scheduled for the week of April 24-28, 2006.

Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R.)

Drop Everything And Read is a designated time when everyone (students, teachers, administrators, support staff, etc.) stops and reads together – for example, the third Wednesday of each month from 1 to 1:15 p.m. Each school can set its own time, but the commitment must be for at least once a month. Many schools promote this activity weekly and even daily. This year, we are hoping for a commitment from all of our schools.

Sign-up forms for Drop Everything And Read will be going out to all Consortium schools in September. It also can be printed from MVEC's website: www.mvec.org. Completed forms are due back at the Consortium office by Friday, Oct. 14, 2005.

Mon Valley Reads April 24-28, 2006

During Mon Valley Reads, the emphasis is on books and all things literary, with a little fun thrown in. Special reading activities for students, teachers, administration, and community members have been the rule for the past six years of this annual observance. Each school is asked to plan a reading activity for at least one day during Mon Valley Reads.

Examples of activities from the past include: guest readers in the classroom, day-long activities based in the school library with community and celebrity guests, reading marathons, a Book-nic (picnics with books outdoors, weather permitting), a walk to the river for reading and snacks, reading rallies and visits from favorite book characters (Clifford the Big Red Dog, Arthur the Aardvark).

Each participating school receives commemorative Mon Valley Reads bookmarks for students, a small keepsake for celebrating the joys of reading with the Consortium. Signup information for this portion of the Power Reading on the River program will be coming in February/March.



Older students helping younger peers is a favorite Mon Valley Reads activity.

For the Love of Books on for 2006, may expand to W.Va.

The Mon Valley Education Consortium's popular For the Love of Books event will be expanding in 2006 to include the newest Borders Books and Music store at Pittsburgh Mills.

And a version of the program may take root in West Virginia, at the Borders store in Barboursville.

Stephen Seliy, MVEC Associate Executive Director, and David M. Pribish, Literacy for Life Coordinator, met with Borders Group executives to discuss the expansion plan.

Ronda McLeod, Regional Sales and Marketing Manager, and Traci Egan, Director of Field Marketing and Events, were on hand, along with Rae Whitfield of the Monroeville Borders who's also a member of the Consortium's Board of Directors.

"The program has the mark of a true regional event. This store at Pittsburgh Mills will join South Hills, North Hills and Monroeville during the February observance of For the Love of Books, when we celebrate literacy, showcase local children's authors and collect new and gently used children's books," Seliy said.

The new store, which is located in the sprawling new shopping complex north of Pittsburgh, gives the retailer 36 stores in Pennsylvania. That number includes the recent renaming of the Borders Group subsidiary, Waldenbooks, to Borders Express earlier this summer.

"We are very pleased that the Borders Group believes in our work," Pribish said of the retailer's willingness to expand. "And, we are pleased that further expansion rests on the horizon."

Whitfield, who is this region's district marketing manager for Borders Books and Music, has been instrumental in helping other Borders stores look at adopting For the Love of Books. Whitfield has initiated discussions with several stores outside Pennsylvania, among them the Barboursville, W.Va., store, which is looking to launch the program in 2006.

"They (Barboursville) are very excited to look at this model and assimilate the process," Whitfield said.

The West Virginia component is being actively pursued with the help of The Education Alliance, a local education fund and fellow Public Education Network member located in Huntingdon, W.Va.



Borders Group executives met with representatives of the Mon Valley Education Consortium to discuss expanding the annual For the Love of Books program. Pictured from left are Traci Egan, Borders Director of Field Marketing and Events; Rae Whitfield, Borders District Marketing Manager; David Pribish, MVEC's Literacy for Life Coordinator, and Ronda McLeod, Borders Regional Sales and Marketing Manager.

Over the past three years, For the Love of Books has provided more than 4,500 students with opportunities to participate in literacy events, meet local children's authors, become familiar with a modern bookstore, and receive a free children's book through corporate and community sponsorship.

Meanwhile, more than 452,000 new and gently used children's books have been donated at the Borders' stores and through book drives. These have been redistributed to the area's neediest youngsters via the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

The 2006 "For the Love of Books" celebration again will wrap around Valentine's Day. Check the MVEC website in the upcoming weeks for specific dates.

You can support the 2006 observance of For the Love of Books by sponsoring a book drive in your community, business or school prior to February. Posters and other information on the types of new or gently used children's books needed are available from the Consortium (contact David Pribish at 412-678-9215 or at dprish@mvec.org).

The View From Here *New year, new hope, renewed commitment*

By Linda L. Croushore, Ed.D., Executive Director, Mon Valley Education Consortium

Each year as the school year begins, there is a wonderful spirit of anticipation. Members of the Consortium staff get to experience this first-hand as we visit schools on the first inservice days.

Never have we heard the acronym AYP used so often in opening remarks! It is wonderful to learn that school after school has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress.

Many districts are welcoming new professionals to their staffs (in some cases, at least 10 percent). They join the ranks of dedicated professionals who teach our region's young people.

While the challenges of student achievement are clear, and sanctions are clear as well if we don't perform, it is exciting that enthusiasm is the dominant emotion.

Seeing the staff of George Washington Elementary School (McKeesport Area S.D.) featured in The Pittsburgh Post Gazette's South section (8/25/05) as they made welcome visits to the homes of all incoming first graders makes a strong statement about the school's commitment to serve.

Hearing East Allegheny's report of a fabulous reception by the State Department of Education at the Governor's Institute for Parent Involvement puts our region out there as committed to seriously engaging parents and families in the life of the school. The group that made the trip to Harrisburg currently is working to create a Parent Room at the high school, designed by and for parents. It's another step in the evolution of the Full Service Community School, now in its second full year of operation at EA.

The enthusiasm of The Future Is Mine Student Project advisors in their training for this school year says we are learning to listen to and shepherd our young people, recognize their creativity and support their efforts to understand the world that awaits them.

Reading through the array of workshops available this year through Mon Valley Learns shows keen interest among public school professionals in sharing best practices and welcoming others to "steal shamelessly."

The start of a new term is a thoughtful time as well. In the not-too-distant past, public schools were accepted, unquestioningly, as an institution that was

here to stay, the cornerstone of a civil and democratic society. Today, that very concept is being challenged. We know we need to respond by being better than ever. Our role expands to include marketing, promoting and partnership building, all while we continue to improve instruction and student outcomes.



Dr. Linda L. Croushore

What makes us proud is that we are rising to the challenge. More and more school employees are stepping up to the plate to do their part. Our Leadership Design Team conversations are not about what we don't have, but about what we need to do for our schools and our students and how to do it the best way we can.

Distributive leadership, the notion of the broadest collaboration and delegation of work in our efforts to successfully educate, continues to evolve. We thank the countless community organizations, businesses, parents and others who have joined us in this work. Our hats are off to all of you!

Our expectations are high for all students. Lofty goals can be met by day-to-day diligence. We are keeping our eyes on the prize – a quality public school experience for every child, a chance at a successful and productive life.



The East Allegheny team at the Governor's Institute for Parent Involvement in Harrisburg.

MVEC SHORT TAKES

E. Allegheny, Bentworth win Project 720 funds

Two Consortium school districts – Bentworth and East Allegheny – have won a share of the \$5.3 million set aside by the state for Project 720, the high school reform initiative that's aimed at boosting math and science achievement.

Sixty-three school districts, two vocational-technical schools and one charter school were selected to participate.

The Consortium worked with 10 of its school districts on the application for Project 720, so named for the number of school days in four years of high school. It calls for participating school districts to work toward requiring four years of high school math, including Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II.

Bentworth is in line to receive \$65,000 and East Allegheny, \$60,000. More than 160 high schools applied to participate in Project 720.

Consortium supports journalism workshop

Once again this year, the Consortium contributed to the scholarship fund for the summer High School Journalism Workshop at Point Park College.

Twenty-five students attended, including Katherine Jakub of Ringgold High School. Workshop participants sharpened their interviewing, writing and editing skills and designed both a newspaper and website over the course of the six-day program.

Two at Frazier named Distinguished Educators

Two retiring Frazier School District administrators – Frederick Smeigh and Linda Nelson – have been selected as PDE Distinguished Educators.

Distinguished Educators work as part of a team, providing expertise and support to struggling school districts.

Under Dr. Smeigh's tenure as Frazier's superintendent, the district went from a low-achieving to a high-achieving district, recognized at state and national levels for its academic successes. Dr. Nelson is supervisor of K-12 curriculum and instruction, a member of the central administrative team that helped shape the academic turnaround.

New superintendents at Bentworth, Frazier

Dr. Paul Rach, former superintendent at Yough School District, has assumed the superintendency of Bentworth School District.

He succeeds Thomas Turnbaugh, who left Bentworth for the top job at Trinity Area School District. Dr. Rach worked with the Consortium following his tenure at Yough.

In Frazier, Dr. Dennis Spinella, a native of Mt. Pleasant, has been named to succeed Dr. Frederick Smeigh as superintendent.

Dr. Spinella has been an assistant superintendent in Bristol Township School District near Philadelphia for the past two years. He has had a 30-year career in education, 25 of those in administration.



The annual golf outing co-sponsored by the Brownsville School Action Committee has grown over the years and now draws about 130 golfers.

School Action Committees

From golf outings to school board forums, MVEC's grassroots groups have had a busy year

School Action Committees, the grassroots groups that support the Consortium's work in individual school districts, have had a busy year reaching out to the community on behalf of public education and raising funds for Great Idea Grants for their teachers.

Coming up on September 27 in California Area School District is a Spaghetti Dinner at Hugo's Restaurant on Route 40, beginning at 5 p.m. Tickets are \$5.50 and must be purchased in advance; no tickets will be sold at the door. Tickets may be obtained by calling California Area School District (724-938-2511). The dinner will feature a Chinese auction and door prizes, with proceeds going to the teacher grant fund for the school district.

In Bentworth, the School Action Committee is gearing up for the first-ever Homecoming Reunion weekend for all alumni of Bentworth, Bentleyville and Ellsworth High Schools. Activities will begin with the Homecoming Weekend football game on Sept. 23, and continue with a full day of events on Saturday, Sept. 24.

The School Action Committee for Brownsville Area School District had another successful golf outing in May at Carmichaels Golf Club and raised \$3,000 for its teacher grant fund. The committee already has chosen the date for the 2006 event: May 6, again at Carmichaels. Members work with the Sons of Italy to host the golf outing each year. In 2005, it drew some 130 golfers.

In Steel Valley, the School Action Committee, working with the school district, hosted another Steel Valley Community Leaders Breakfast. Business and civic officials gathered at the high school for an update on school district and Consortium activities. This year's program was highlighted by an appearance by members of the Steel Valley Drama Club who performed selections from their 2005 musical production of "Footloose." Additional musical entertainment was provided by "The Classmates," a student group dedicated to bringing back the "oldies."

MVEC ASKING TEACHERS FOR BEST LESSON PLANS

The Consortium and the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) are joining forces to create a database of "authentic instruction" lesson plans and learning strategies that will be available to educators across the Commonwealth via a link on three educational websites.

The goal of the project is to gather the "best of the best" and organize them in a format that relates directly to the state's academic standards. What's distinctive about "authentic instruction" is its ability to link topics from lesson plans to the real world.

"Every teacher faces the questions, 'Why am I learning this' or 'How will I use this after I graduate,'" said Dr. Linda L. Croushore, MVEC executive director. "Here is where authentic instruction can provide a real-life application."

For example, as part of a social studies or science lesson, teachers might use a map of their students'

local community, home county or state in a lesson on producing, interpreting and following directions. Students could separate into groups and give directions to each other using map coordinates, route numbers, a compass or GPS coordinates, all of which call into use a wide range of skills that students will need and use in life.

All lesson plans will be organized on the web, by subject area and category, within the Pennsylvania Standards, beginning with reading, writing, math, and science. Additional subject areas will be added as testing expands. Teachers eventually will be able to simply log on to any of these websites – www.mvec.org, www.thefutureismine.com, www.psea.org – to find them.

All teachers across Pennsylvania are invited to share their best lessons and earn Act 48 credit in the process. And, as a result of the Consortium's ongoing partnership with



Monessen School Action Committee Chair Linda Pankiewicz, second from left, recruited her friends and colleagues to staff a game booth and a bar at The Great Kennywood Caper 2004. Their volunteerism boosted the Monessen City School District teacher grant fund.

The annual Talent Show in Frazier School District in February drew another big crowd and raised \$800 for that district's Great Idea Grants fund. The program, which puts middle and high school students in the spotlight, is a joint effort of the high school's Best Friends, Inc., organization and the Consortium, with proceeds split between the two groups. The 2005 show was the sixth in as many years.

The School Action Committee for McKeesport Area, one of the Consortium's most active groups, was busy in 2004-2005 with a School Board Forum, sponsored for the community before the May primary election; the Library Penny Drive in February; and the annual Ready to Read, Ready to Lead campaign. Committee members recruit community partners to supplement student contributions to the Penny Drive, which raises money for school libraries and the Carnegie Library of McKeesport. When the pennies (and nickels, dimes and dollars) were counted this year, the various libraries shared \$8,750. McKeesport Area Council of PTAs is a partner in this program as well.

Great Idea Grant funds in 10 school districts also benefited from the work of School Action Committees at the Consortium's fourth Great Kennywood Caper in September of 2004. These committee members staffed the games booths and shared in the total proceeds from those activities. Each group realized approximately \$1,000.

All of the above, and Change for Children donations by educators in a number of other school districts, support the teacher grant portion of the Great Idea Grants initiative. While the Consortium seeks funds for the larger school grants (average \$1,500) and district grants (maximum \$5,000), School Action Committees are charged with raising money for teacher grants, which average \$300. Teacher grants are evaluated and awarded by School Action Committees in each school district, while the larger school and district grants are decided by a special committee comprised of the chairs of the local groups.

Borders Books and Music, teachers whose lesson plans are published on the web also will receive a \$50 Borders gift certificate.

To access a printable lesson plan form, go to the Consortium's website – www.mvec.org – and follow the links on the homepage. Plans also can be submitted online.

Karen Racunas, a respected veteran teacher who recently retired from Ringgold School District, is helping the Consortium coordinate this effort. She will be working with a panel of educators charged with evaluating all lessons submitted.



Karen Racunas

To read more about the Authentic Instruction project or to contact Karen Racunas, call the Consortium office at 412-678-9215 or go to the website: www.mvec.org.

ROBOT RIPPLES

McKeesport Area High School teacher Mike Dischner, at right, gets a close-up view of circuitry and computer programming related to Carnegie Mellon University's National Robotics Consortium's automated work cell robot.



From time to time, when the Consortium begins a program or initiative or makes an opportunity available to its partner schools, that action ripples out in ways never expected.

For example, take what's come to be known at MVEC as "the robot thing."

In January of 2005, David Richardson of the Northside Leadership Conference contacted staff members of the Consortium's initiative, The Future Is Mine (TFIM), and asked if they could recruit a student/teacher team to participate in a robotics competition. "We knew that Mike Dischner and his engineering technology students at McKeesport Area High School could fill the bill," said TFIM Project Director Aimee D. LeFevers.

The 11-member McKeesport team started weeks after other, more experienced competitors. But they assembled their robot "Charles" (named for Charles Darwin with a nod to his theory of evolution and "survival of the fittest"), tested it in the halls of the high school, and headed for the Pittsburgh regional qualifying event for the FIRST Robotics Competition (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) in March. Then, despite a glitch on the competition floor, they did more than survive; they came up big.

Not only did they qualify for the nationals, but members of the team also were named Rookie All Stars. "That's what working with good kids does for you," Dischner said.

The team and "Charles" moved on to the nationals at the Georgia Dome on April 21-23, 2005, no

small feat since the robot had to be safely packed up for shipping and funds for the trip had to be raised in short order. Underwriting came from The Heinz Endowments.

In Atlanta, the McKeesport team had a respectable showing for a first-time entry – 23rd out of 85. Over and above the competition itself, the experience of building Charles and then traveling to the nationals was a highpoint of the year for the team.

Dischner said robotics made a half dozen of his students eager for college.

Then this summer, Dischner spent five weeks at Carnegie Mellon University's National Robotics Engineering Consortium in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the program encourages teachers to research robotics so they can incorporate it into their teaching.

He plans to do just that. And when this year's FIRST competition rolls around, McKeesport will be there with a wiser, more experienced team.

Maxwell King, president of The Heinz Endowments, writing in the Endowments' *h* magazine, cited the \$6,000 grant made by Heinz to the McKeesport team as an example of a small investment that had an "outsized impact."

He went on to say that the team's accomplishments embodied a key goal of the Endowments' grantmaking: "to spur southwestern Pennsylvanians to take on a competitive drive and passion that rejects the lifestyle of reduced expectations and demands the highest quality-of-life standards."

PEN staffers make field visit to MVEC office



Two officials from the Public Education Network, the Washington, D.C.-based national organization to which the Consortium belongs, recently made a fact-finding and information-gathering visit to MVEC's office. Kashap Choksi, Senior Associate, Member Development at PEN (left), and Rudy Careaga, Senior Associate, Research and Evaluation, met with staff members here. The Consortium is one of PEN's longest-standing members. The local education funds (LEFs) affiliated with PEN serve more than 11.5 million students in 18,000 schools across the U.S.



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CONRAD JOINS TFIM STAFF

Carrie L. Conrad, at left, has joined the Consortium as part of the staff for The Future Is Mine (TFIM). She's shown here with TFIM Project Director Aimee D. LeFevers and MVEC's semi-official office pet, Bianca the Guinea Pig, who is monitoring LeFevers' keyboard work.

MVEC receives \$300,000 from Heinz Endowments; Dominion Foundation funds Great Idea Grants

The Mon Valley Education Consortium has received a \$300,000 grant from The Heinz Endowments to support core operational costs and The Future Is Mine.

"The Heinz Endowments have been an important investment partner for the Consortium over the years. While we are very grateful for their financial commitment, we also value their assistance and support as we work to make a high-quality public education a reality for every child in the Mon Valley," said Linda L. Croushore, Ed.D., executive director of the Consortium.

Dominion has awarded \$3,000 to the Consortium for grants dealing with math, science and the environment. Great Idea Grants Coordinator Patricia E. Hoke says the money will be used to fund 10 teacher grants of \$300 each. Dominion has been underwriting Great Idea Grants since the 1994-95 school year.

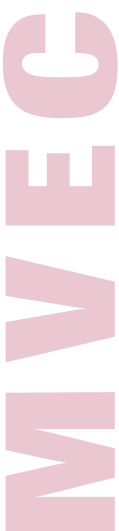
The Heinz Endowments support efforts to make southwestern Pennsylvania a premier place to live and work, a center of learning and educational excellence, and a home to diversity and inclusion. Committed to helping its region thrive as a whole-community – economically, ecologically, educationally and culturally – the foundation works within Pennsylvania and elsewhere in the nation to develop solutions to challenges that are national and even international in scope. One of the largest and most innovation independent philanthropic foundations in the county, the Endowments awarded over \$54 million in grants in 2004.

The Dominion Foundation is dedicated to the economic, physical and social health of the companies served by the Dominion companies. Dominion is one of the nation's largest producers of energy, with an energy portfolio of about 28,100 megawatts of generation. It also serves retail energy customers in nine states.



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