Representatives from UMass Lowell were on hand to receive the Governor's Leading by Example award during a State House ceremony on Beacon Hill in October.

UMass Lowell Wins Governor’s ‘Leading by Example’ Award

University Honored for Environmental, Clean Energy Achievements

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By Edwin L. Aguirre

Citing the University’s outstanding energy and environmental leadership, the state recently presented UMass Lowell with a Leading by Example award.

Established by Gov. Deval Patrick in 2007, the annual award recognizes state agencies, public universities and colleges, municipalities and individuals for their efforts in significantly reducing energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, increasing recycling and the use of renewable energy and other clean-energy and environmental quality initiatives.

The award recognizes the University for making clean energy and energy efficiency improvements over the years. For example, the North Campus Power Plant recently replaced two of its three boilers with more energy-efficient units and converted the third one from fuel oil to cleaner natural gas, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by more than 4,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent annually. The University's zero-sort recycling program, meanwhile, has increased the solid waste recycling rate on campus by more than 376 percent, from 97 tons in 2008 to 462 tons in 2011.

The award also notes that UMass Lowell “is the first New England college or university to achieve Green Guard certification, aimed at protecting human health and improving quality of life by enhancing indoor air quality and reducing exposure to chemicals and other pollutants.”

This year’s other winners include the state’s Department of Correction and Department of Conservation and Recreation, North Shore Community College, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, the towns of Sutton and Scituate and residents of Norton and Sudbury.

A Campuswide Effort

“Leading by Example is a prestigious award that recognizes our multifaceted energy conservation program,” says Thomas Dreyer, UMass Lowell's associate vice chancellor for facilities management. “We have three great reasons to conserve: It is a good business decision, it is a great example for our students, who will be the green leaders of tomorrow, and it meets the strategic goals of the governor and our University.”

Adds Paul Piraino, UMass Lowell’s energy and sustainability manager in Facilities Operations & Services: “The award elevates the University’s standing to prospective students that this is a highly technological institution with a very environmentally conscious program that will help keep the Earth a sustainable planet. Ecology, sustainability and energy conservation are highly important topics for new students looking at colleges.”

Accolades belong to people and departments across the campus, says biology Assoc. Prof. Juliette Rooney-Varga, director of UMass Lowell's Climate Change Initiative.
“One of the most important things to recognize about this award is that it is a campuswide award — in other words, it was given to UMass Lowell in recognition of the work of many, many faculty, administrators, students and staff across the campus,” notes Rooney-Varga. “In fact, there is good reason to believe that the breadth of our work across the University is exactly why we received this award. In a remarkably short amount of time, we have been able to pull together a tremendously diverse group of people around a common cause.”

Other sustainable practices at UMass Lowell include:

- Working toward achieving the goals outlined in the University’s Climate Action Plan (CAP) by implementing projects on campus and incorporating energy and environmental awareness into academic curricula and community outreach. The CAP, signed into action by Chancellor Marty Meehan in January, commits the campus to attaining carbon neutrality by 2050.
- Installing solar photovoltaic arrays on the roofs of Costello Gym, Bourgeois Hall, Dugan Hall and Leitch Hall with a combined output of 250 kilowatts, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 115 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent annually.
- Installing more than 100 real-time, building-level energy meters on campus to track electricity, gas and steam usage and identify opportunities for increasing efficiency, especially during peak hours.
- Incorporating green building principles as the University continues to grow, as demonstrated by the most recent campus addition, the Emerging Technologies and Innovation Center (ETIC), a LEED Silver building. Other LEED-certified buildings being constructed on campus are the Health and Social Sciences building, University Suites and University Crossing. These buildings are expected to reduce annual emissions by 1,670 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

The award ceremony, which was held Oct. 25 at the State House in Boston, was attended by (shown in the photo, from left) Robert Barnett, executive director of Business Administrative Services; Paul Piraino; Vice Chancellor for Finance and Operations Joanne Yestramski; Donald Lampron, director of maintenance and trades in Facilities Operations & Services; Prof. Robert Gamache of the Department of Environmental, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences; Richard Lemoine, director of Environmental and Emergency Management; Juliette Rooney-Varga and Thomas Dreyer.

“Governor Patrick has set some of the most ambitious energy efficiency and renewable energy targets in the nation, and our state and local governments are setting the pace when it comes to reaching those targets,” says Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Rick Sullivan. “This year’s winners are really walking the walk and taking steps that will continue to yield long-term environmental and economic dividends for years to come.”

For more information about the Leading by Example program, go to the state’s website.