

# The Dallas Morning News

## It's all about the long game at Leeward Renewable Energy

CEO Jason Allen discussed what's driving the Dallas-based company's fast growth and how it's standing out in the renewable space.



Leeward Renewable Energy CEO Jason Allen stands in the control center at the company's headquarters at Energy Square in Dallas. (Juan Figueroa / Staff Photographer)

By Anna Butler

6:00 AM on Apr 5, 2024

Leeward Renewable Energy plans to double the size of its Dallas, Houston and Chicago offices.

The company grew its workforce by about 55% last year. It currently has 340 employees and aims to end 2024 with a headcount of 400.

With 31 wind, solar and energy storage facilities across the U.S., the company, which is headquartered in Dallas, has another 125 projects in its pipeline amounting to about 30 gigawatts of power.

For perspective, a 1-gigawatt power plant powers approximately 876,000 homes for a year, according to advisory services firm Carbon Collective Investment LLC.

Leeward Renewable Energy's developments bring with them billions of dollars of risk, requiring a balancing act. The company's investments are backed by the infrastructure arm of the Ontario Municipal Employees' Retirement System, a Canadian public pension fund.

"The money we're using is 570,000 people's retirement funds, and our employees take that very seriously because we're making sure they can retire in the next 20, 30 or 40 years," CEO Jason Allen said.

When Allen joined the company about seven years ago, Leeward Renewable Energy was a relatively small company, with about 1,200 megawatts of wind assets. The Ontario retirement fund purchased the firm about a year and a half later, looking to build a renewable energy platform with an aggressive strategy including solar and storage.

Adding employees and keeping them is critical to growing materially year over year, according to Allen.

A sticky workforce also helps get long-term renewable projects off the ground.

It can take anywhere from three to seven years to go from project concept to operations. That process includes a transmission group figuring out where there's capacity on the existing electricity grid, triangulating areas and identifying land to buy or lease, putting in interconnection requests, and a couple of years of studies. Once all of the local permits go through, equipment comes in and building is complete in about a year, a project can come online and operate for 30 to 40 years.

"It's all about the long game here," Allen said.

Allen spoke more about where the opportunities are for the company, how it's setting itself apart in a space many other companies are flocking to and how it's engaging local Texans in the process:

***Q: Tell me about the hunt for talent in the renewable energy space.***

**Allen:** There are a lot of companies growing in the renewable space, so it is competitive. One of the key differentiators for us is not only attracting people based on the clean energy

story, but to work with us specifically. We have a retention rate in the upper 80s, which is well above market average.

We've also found there's a deep bench of talent to help us accomplish our staffing goals in Texas, especially in Dallas and Houston. It is one of the energy capitals of the U.S., whether that's oil and gas, power or renewables.

***Q: You spent 24 years working with a large utility (Duke Energy). What have you taken from your background in power generation to the renewable energy space? Or is power just power?***

**Allen:** Whether it's a company, commercial restaurant or the general public, people expect electricity to be there all the time. Reliability is key.

There is a large transition and demand right for clean power, not just power. We've looked to tap that market demand and deliver on it.

With all the innovations, the other key piece is that the technology is getting better. With electricity being a commodity, it's important that whatever the source is that it is commercially competitive and can be delivered at the best price for whoever's buying it. What we're doing now is delivering wind, solar and storage that are competitive with any other type of generation, and that's the way it should be.

***Q: Is there a particular exit strategy with the new renewable projects?***

**Allen:** We are a long-term developer, builder, owner operator of assets. Different people in the market do different things, but we pride ourselves in being the company that oversees the construction of the project and that we own and operate them for their life.

Quite frankly, that's why a lot of our employees have come here. They want to know and see their hard work actually become a real asset and be operated for the long term. It's the execution certainty that we have because of our owners and our investment strategy.

There are a lot of supply chain issues out there — long delays for transformers. Things like that. We've been able to secure turbine solar module transformer contracts and we're buying equipment now for projects that will be built in 2026. Knowing that we can build in the timeframes that we say we can is what is helping us excel in that space and differentiate ourselves.

***Q: Can you tell me more about the company's land stewardship program?***

**Allen:** There are different pilot concepts because we have projects in different parts of the country. Prior to construction, we hire a biologist to research all the native species, and once we're done with construction, we only plant those to restore what was farmland for decades. With that type of farming, the soil gets depleted. The goal of that planting and biodiversity is that over that 30- to 40 year-period, the soil will be restored back to its original state.

It's symbiotic because these solar sites are massive. We were spending \$500,000 to \$600,000 a year to mow them. But, if I let somebody come in and graze sheep for free, it takes my operating costs down. If I let somebody put bees on the site, it helps the environment.

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