

# STEPPING OUT IN STYLE

FIRST AMERICAN DEBUTS A MODERN STAINLESS STEEL ENCLOSURE THAT COMBINES SOLAR POWER AND LED LIGHTING

by Tracey Timpanaro

## **SUPERMAN WOULD BE IMPRESSED.**

First American Telecommunications Corp. has debuted what is believed to be the nation's first solar-powered payphone booth that uses light emitting diode (LED) lighting. And it's 100 per cent stainless steel to boot.

The booth made its debut in downtown Miami in the fall of 2009, and it has been doing well ever since. First American, which is a large, Ft. Lauderdale-based payphone service provider (PSP), plans to place more of the same throughout south Florida in 2010 and 2011. The company, which has hired a manufacturer to do the custom production, calls the product a public phone and information kiosk.

"We were pretty happy that we came up with something quite unique when the industry was declining," said Vice President Guy Stremack. "We're very excited about it."

## **AND SO IT BEGINS...**

The genesis for the kiosk came about in 1999. First American had a large municipal contract, and the city asked the company if it could come up with a unique enclosure that could be used throughout the entire city. Officials wanted something attractive that was graffiti- and weather-resistant.

"At first we were going to do a steel booth, but then we said, 'let's go the extra step and do stainless steel,'" Stremack said. "It's much more durable, and the weather environment here is tough."

City officials were very pleased with the design, and gave the

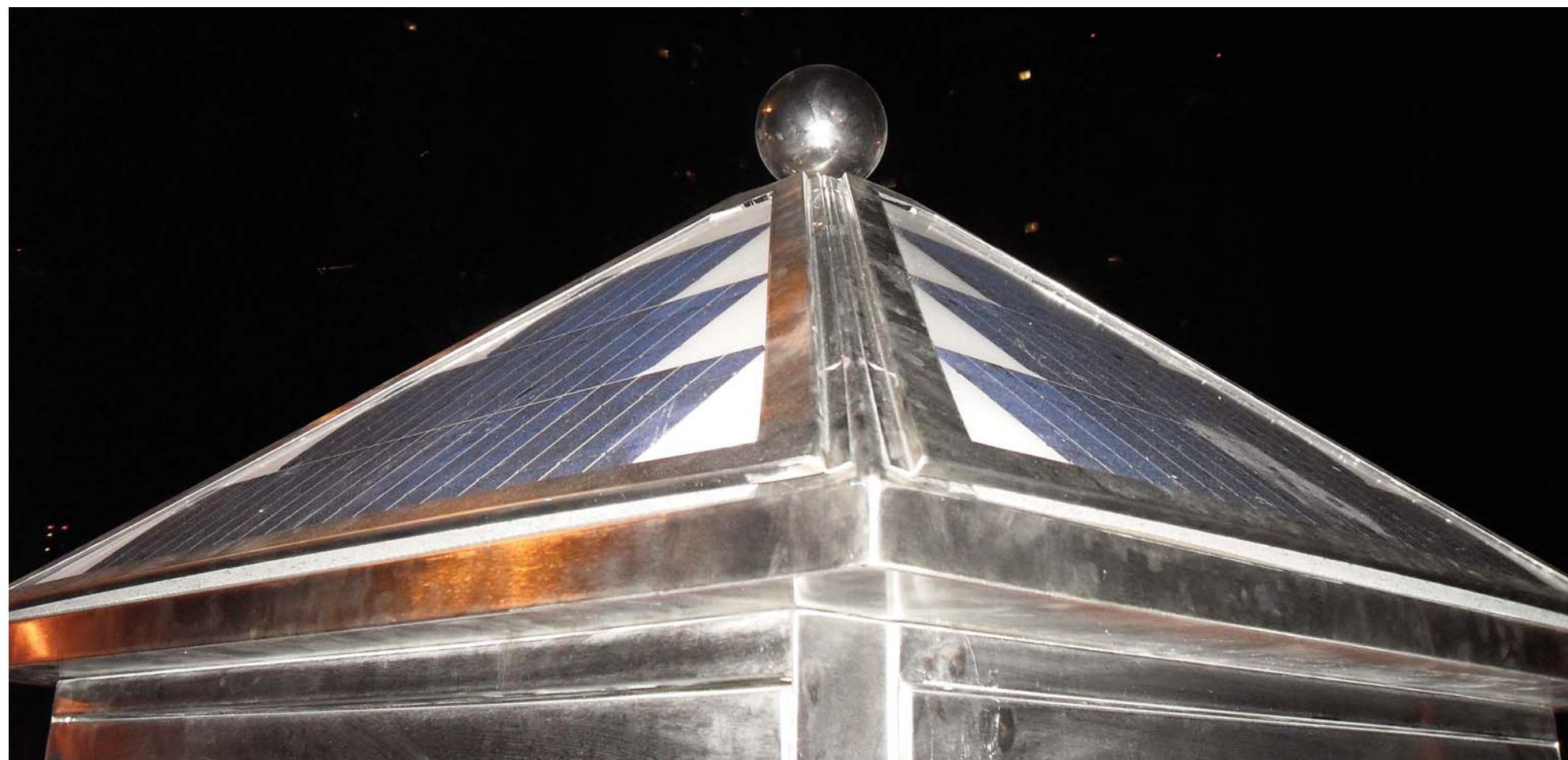
company the green light. First American explained that producing the kiosks would be an expensive venture, so it wanted to sell advertising panels to offset the costs. The city agreed.

"We also offered the city a percentage of the ad revenue, so they got a little money and we offset our costs. Everyone was happy," Stremack says.

First American wanted to go a step further and illuminate

the booths, so it started doing research along those lines. In 1999, however, all the lighting options were fluorescent, which meant using high voltage power.

At that time, a few bus shelters were in fact using high voltage lighting, and a child was electrocuted at a bus shelter in Dade County. First American decided not to pursue high voltage lighting. ➤



⦿ A few years later, the company revisited the lighting issue when solar technology started gaining more popularity. However, fluorescents were still the only lighting option, and they need a ton of power. “We would have had to install solar panels the size of an SUV to make that work,” Strempack says.

Recent advances in both LED lighting and solar cells gave the company the boost it needed, however, and it was finally able to come up with a design that would work for its kiosk. So in addition to its other features, the kiosk can be commended for being green — i.e. environmentally friendly (solar and LED) — as well. It’s also green because it has a street life of 20 years, and the end-of-life recycling ratio of stainless steel is 80 to 90 percent.

### KIOSKS BOTH PRETTY AND POPULAR

The kiosk has four solar cell roof panels. The solar cells collect the energy, which is stored in a battery inside the kiosk. There is a controller in the kiosk, too, and you can set it to illuminate the booth for as many hours as you would like.

The kiosk also has panels that can be used to display information that would be useful for the public. At the moment, the kiosk has a map on it with listings of local attractions, city facilities, bars and restaurants, etc. Some of the original stainless steel booths posted similar information, but the new booth allows for the information to be illuminated and therefore viewable at night.

One of the great benefits of the original stainless steel booths was that they increased traffic (and hence revenue) on the payphones. First American is pretty confident the same will hold true for the illuminated booths.

“Those phones were used more often for several reasons,” Strempack says. “They provided a little cover; people could

walk up and lean on the inside. They are also cleaner and they look more upscale, more cosmopolitan. And now, the lights provide a safety aspect. People are going to feel safe when an area is illuminated.”

### GOOD PR, TOO

Customers weren’t the only ones who were happy with the stainless steel kiosks. Government officials were pretty pleased as well. “One of the main reasons they were happy is because they are so easy to clean. In some major cities, graffiti is crazy,” Strempack says. “We have people on the streets cleaning them every day. And after they’re clean, it looks like we just put them in.”

Government officials are also happy because the kiosks are an upgrade from many traditional enclosures. “If it’s something that is more trendy and hip, then it is definitely more attractive to them,” Strempack says. “And another thing about the stainless steel is that it blends in with the environment, even with the advertising on it.”

Bruce Renard, president of the Florida Public Telecommunications Association (FPTA) and an APCC board member, would agree. “Clearly, aesthetics are very important to government officials who are charged with creating an attractive urban environment,” he says.

Beyond that, though, Renard maintains the upgraded enclosures help foster better relations between the payphone industry and government officials. “Since these more modern enclosures have been deployed, I feel like their attitudes have improved and the perception is much more positive overall,” Renard says.



“I also think there’s a growing recognition among many local government officials that they’re losing the availability of public phones when the need for such phones is still so great,” Renard continued. “They seem to be making that connection.”

It’s a connection that is emphasized by Strempack. “People still very much need payphones, especially now,” he says. “We’re in tough economic times, with people losing their jobs and their homes. When that happens, the cell phone is often one of the first things to go. From what we’ve seen, people will always rely on payphones.”

Renard said the FPTA commends the effort undertaken by First American. “We applaud the company for its initiative, and we think it’s a very positive step for the industry. Deploying innovative and green technology of this type is a good thing for all concerned — we certainly hope others will follow suit.” ■

*Editor’s note:* If you have questions about the kiosk, please contact Guy Strempack at (954) 524-9999, ext. 12, or via e-mail at [guy@firstamericantelecom.com](mailto:guy@firstamericantelecom.com).