

Energizing Corvallis

By Daniel Weiland

VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION HELPS CORVALLIS GO SOLAR.

The Willamette Valley has a reputation for cloudy skies, but harnessing the energy of the sun is easier than you think. Corvallis-based Solar Creek has been helping residents cut down on their electric bills and convert to the earth-friendly power source for years.

At Solar Creek, no one gets paid. Since 2003, the entirely volunteer organization has installed photovoltaic solar collectors, or PVs, on both of the First Alternative Co-op grocery stores as well as Lincoln Elementary School. Upcoming projects include this year's Green and Solar Homes Tour and a PV array on the new Corvallis High School.

Solar Creek was founded in honor of Jack Dymond's work towards raising awareness of solar power and building sustainable communities. An early environmentalist, he worked to make people realize the link between burning fossil fuels to generate electricity and pollution. "People who want to have an impact on their community, those are the people who go for it," said volunteer Kirk Bailey of Solar Assist.

Jonathan Carroll is a Solar Creek volunteer and a manager at First Alternative. He explains how the co-op's principles motivated the management council to install a 2.6 kilowatt system on each store last winter. They've got a rooftop patio on the south co-op where customers can check out the solar panels in action. "It's about giving awareness to the public," he said. "I can't tell you how many people come in to ask me about the solar panels. For businesses, with all the incentives, it's a no-brainer."

But for Carroll, the environmental aware-

ness didn't stop at the office. He made major changes at home, too. His first step towards energy independence was decreasing wasted energy. He got rid of his heated water bed and added skylight tubes, an on-demand water heater, and an efficient refrigerator. Those small changes brought his energy use down from 10 kilowatt hours per day to two.

budget, can find something that will help reduce electrical use. A simple solar-powered attic fan pays for itself by reducing summer cooling costs and increases the value of your home. A typical solar panel has a 25-year warranty, which means that long before the panel stops working, it's paid for in energy savings.

The growing demand for PV installa-

tem drops from \$20,000 down to about \$5,600," he said.

That's not counting the sale of Green Tags to the Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF). Green Tags, also called Renewable Energy Certificates, are bought by the BEF from renewable energy providers and then sold to conscientious energy consumers who

want to support renewable energy but can't afford their own systems. "This is part of a larger movement, including bio-diesel and wind-power," Reismiller said. "People want to take responsibility for their lives."

Solar Creek's next big project is installing solar panels that will generate 50 to 100 kilowatts at the new Corvallis High School. Since community tax dollars fund education, solar powered schools can allocate their savings to improve education. Plus students at these schools benefit from first-hand experience with a modern technology.

The most inspiring characteristic of all these local volunteers is how much their values harmonize with their work. Each of them acts on their belief in a cleaner, healthier, stronger community for us and our children. In fact, the Creek in Solar

Creek stands for "Clean Renewable Energy for Everyone's Kids."

Corvallis is one of 11 Oregon cities participating in this year's "Green and Solar Homes Tour." On Sunday, Sept. 18 join the Corvallis Solar Tour to see the installations in action. For information visit www.solar-creek.org To learn about financial assistance for installing solar visit <http://egov.oregon.gov/ENERGY> and <http://www.energytrust.org>



Solar Creek volunteers install solar panels at First Alternative Co-op's North Store.

BRYAN WILSON

After adding an adjustable 1.9 kilowatt PV array that's also connected to the power grid, his house now produces four times the energy that he uses in a year. And he never has to worry about running out of electricity if it stays cloudy for days on end because the grid-tied PV works with power from the power company to ensure he has electricity.

While such a complete system isn't the right choice for everyone, the variety of options means all customers, regardless of

tions encouraged Corvallis resident James Reismiller to earn his electrician's license and start his own company, Abundant Solar. He said a lot of people don't realize how various subsidies can dramatically reduce the total cost of a typical business installation. "After you subtract \$6,000 for the Energy Trust of Oregon credit, \$1,400 for the Federal Investment Tax credit, and \$7,000 from the Oregon Department of Energy, the price of a 3,000-watt PV sys-



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