

A CHEAPER SOLAR SOLUTION?

Why buy electricity when you can solarize it? Solarize Eugene wants to bring solar energy to your neighborhood to power your home and heat your water.

There are financial incentives through the state and EWEB for locals to purchase solar panels, but the Solarize Eugene program goes even further, organizing neighborhood groups to hire contractors together. This concerted effort for EWEB customers can cut the installation costs on the labor end as well as on the solar electric panels and water heaters, which are purchased in bulk.

The other aspect of the program is to educate community members about solar installation through workshops allowing contractors to spend less time and money explaining how it all works to each buyer.

The Solarize program has been developed in other parts of the state and began as a southeast Portland project a few years ago. According to parent organization Solar Oregon, the first area to begin the project had 120 residential installations within six months.

Program organizers held a meeting Jan. 11 at the Eugene Public Library to gather volunteers for the project. The program is being coordinated by The Resource Innovation Group (TRIG), a nonprofit affiliated with the Center for Sustainable Communities at Willamette University, which specializes in cultivating these type of approaches to complex social-ecological problems such as climate change.

Sarah Mazze, program manager at TRIG, is heading up the search for volunteers and community outreach.

"The main opportunity for volunteer participation is doing the outreach planning and then the actual outreach for the project," she says.

Community engagement is what Mazze finds to be one of the keys to the Solarize model. In the next few months she is hoping to gather enough volunteers to perform the range of upcoming tasks.

"Canvassing neighborhoods, tabling at events, speaking at different neighborhood association meetings and hanging flyers," she says, are some of the ways volunteers will be involved in getting the word out.

An outreach committee will begin meeting this month and people who would like to get involved can contact Mazze through solarizeeugene.info. Workshops are likely to begin sometime in March.

— Ted Shorack

DEFAZIO ON DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

Oh no, where did Wikipedia go? On Jan. 18 more than 115,000 websites, including Wikipedia, Google and Craigslist, either went black or put up banners to protest SOPA (Stop Online Piracy) and PIPA (Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act). These two bills were created to protect intellectual property rights on the internet, but opponents were concerned that the bills infringed on websites' First Amendment rights to speak freely and disseminate information.

Two days after the protests, and one day after the Congress tabled SOPA, Congressman Peter DeFazio spoke to a UO course on "Internet, Society and Philosophy" about online property rights. During a Q&A session DeFazio and a lecture hall full of university students grappled with the difficult political questions that the U.S. faces as a democracy in the digital age.

DeFazio compared the "unconstitutional provisions" of SOPA and PIPA to the PATRIOT Act, and said that he had been opposed to the two bills for a while. He asserted that the bills were wrought with ambiguous terminology and that they gave undue power to the government to change or remove content on the web without any court proceedings.

"The problem of intellectual property rights on the internet is real and we need to deal with it, but this wasn't the right solution," DeFazio said, "These bills threatened the future of the internet." As an alternative he endorses a less stringent and more tightly worded bill called OPEN (Online Protection and Enforcement of Digital Trade Act) introduced by Sen. Ron Wyden.

DeFazio believes that the huge participation and success of the recent online protest against SOPA and PIPA have tremendous implications. "It shows that the people can take on political forces and change the direction of Congress," he said. "It could be a new form of democratization, and I'm hopeful that there's a way to harness this to support a more progressive politics." The discussion ended with resounding applause and with DeFazio encouraging students to get involved and get active in all of the issues that impact their daily lives, even beyond the internet.

— Caitlin McKimmy

biz beat

Brian Obie's **Inn at the 5th** didn't open as planned in mid-January, but the boutique hotel and conference center at Fifth Street Public Market is looking at welcoming its first guests Wednesday, Feb. 1. The hotel already has 1,000 room nights booked for 2012 and lots of queries about weddings and executive retreats, says Heidi Albertson of the inn. The official dedication will likely be in late February, and we are curious to see what VIPs show up. Check www.innat5th.com

We've confirmed that the old Bene's Pizza building on 18th in the Albertson's parking lot will become **Top City Frozen Yogurt Café**, offering self-serve frozen yogurt, full-service coffee and espresso, fruit smoothies and juice drinks. Owners are Joel and Tina Rimmer of Eugene, and Joel tells us they plan to employ up to 15 people, mostly part-time. Opening will be at the end of March. The old credit union vault will be turned into a party/meeting room. The Rimmer family business is Oldfield's Appliance and Home Theater. Joel will continue working in management at Oldfield's and Tina will oversee the yogurt shop with help from their two daughters, Michaela, 17, and Rachel, 14.

The Big One is coming sooner or later, and Oregon businesses concerned about surviving a major earthquake and tsunami can now get help from the Oregon Seismic Safety Policy Advisory commission (OSSPAC) and the Cascadia Regional Earthquake Workgroup (CREW). A workshop is being planned to develop "seismic resiliency" in Oregon. This year-long effort will provide the Legislature with recommended policy options that will help Oregon get back to business quickly after a geologic disaster. The next session will be from 9 am to 4 pm Thursday, Jan. 26, at the Port of Portland Building, 7200 NE Airport Way in Portland. Call Althea Rizzo at (503) 378-2911 ex. 22237.

The **SmartUps January Pub Talk** will be from 5 to 8 pm Thursday, Jan. 26, at the Oregon Electric Station. Speakers will be the founders of local video game companies, including Jeff Tunnell, Dan White, Damon Siye and Pat Wilson. Jay Moore will moderate the panel.

A new Eugene, Cascades & Coast **Sports Commission** is being launched by Travel Lane County and will have its first public meeting at 10 am Monday, Jan. 30 at the Matt Arena on the UO campus. See www.EugeneCascadesCoast.org or call 484-5307.

Send suggestions for Biz Beat items to editor@eugeneweekly.com with "Biz Beat" in the subject line.

LIGHTEN UP

The rumor is that the real reason Chip Kelly decided not to take the head coach job at Tampa Bay is that Phil Knight threatened to buy the NFL and close it down.

BY RAFAEL ALDAVE

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