

Enterprise Electric hooks its star to solar

Plans first purpose-built net zero building in Wallowa County

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Wallowa County and Northeast Oregon are sprouting solar installations at an amazing rate — and Enterprise Electric has plugged in to the trend.

Beginning in 2008 when multiple renewable energy incentives were introduced at the federal, state and local level, Enterprise Electric and Rental saw potential. Now, they’ve been named one of the top solar contractors in the U.S. by Solar Power World magazine, ranking 488 out of 500 solar companies. They ranked eighth in the state.

“We’ve done everything from a 1 KW to 100 KW on the new Enterprise Christian Church and all sizes in between,” said co-owner Jared Hillock. “We get commercial and residential contracts, and we’re pretty much the largest solar installer this side of Bend and definitely in NE Oregon.”

The family-owned business has come a long way since John Sr. and Ida Hillock (Jared’s grandparents) purchased it in 1970. John Hillock Jr. and Jared now own the business.

The 1,200 square-foot shop on Joseph Highway was purchased in 1994. It was clearly too small in 1995, Jared said. They kept growing, adding solar installation in 2008. Today, solar accounts for 25 to 35 percent of the business.

“We’re working from Ontario to Hermiston and Echo to Milton Freewater, Pendleton and La Grande. Next week we’ll be in Pendleton all week doing a new Facility for Agricultural Resource Management building at Blue Mountain Community College. Wellens Farwell is building it, and we got the solar installa-



Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain
Karl Wellens of Wallowa and Jason Yarborough of Lostine work in the footings of the new 10,000 square-foot Enterprise Electric building. It will be the first energy net zero building in the county.



Courtesy photo
An Enterprise home recently topped by solar panels.

the more people take advantage of it, the lower the rebate becomes.

“At the start of the year, that was about \$3,000 and now it’s down to \$1,800 due to demand,” Jared said.

The solar system Enterprise Electric installs is hooked to the Internet and monitored online by Enterprise Electric. They can see how every single solar panel is performing at any time. If a panel is bad, it will light up the monitoring equipment, and Enterprise Electric will “jump up on the roof and check it out,” Jared said. That’s part of the service, free for the life of the system.

“It couldn’t be easier from a customer’s point of view,” Jared said. “We do all the tax credit application and incentive paperwork, too. All we need is a signature.”

Even with the concerns over lost state tax credits, Enterprise Electric is sold on renewable energy and it’s place in Northeast Oregon. So sure that they’re betting on it by building a new shop in Enterprise on Hurricane Creek Road.

“Right now, solar is 25 to 35 percent of the business,” Jared said. “It’s allowed us to add an employee — it’s definitely benefited us and the community. Everybody loves their solar. Getting that first bill greatly reduced — everybody seems pretty excited about it.”

So, the Hillocks are building a 10,000 square-foot building that will be the first purpose built net zero building in Wallowa County.

The roof will be covered with solar panels, it will have ground source geothermal heat pumps, it will be “super insulated,” and it will have a high-efficiency heating system. The benefits will be felt county-wide, Jared said.

“We’ve got more employees than we’ve ever had. My brother Andy joined the business on Monday. That makes 10. That’s crazy. And we’ll have to hire more people when we get the new shop built (by next spring),” he said.

buck, he said.

A 6.5 kw system makes about \$65 a month in electricity. During the day when the solar array is making power, a Pacific Power meter runs backward. At night when drawing electricity from the grid, credit is used.

The cost of an average solar array is \$18,500, but there is a one-time 30 percent federal tax credit (approximately \$5,500), a \$6,000 state tax credit and a \$1,800 rebate from Energy Trust — the organization that disperses incentives paid by Portland Power and Pacific Power.

That incentive may be changing, which has Jared concerned. The federal tax credit is available until 2019, but the state legislature failed to renew the state credit for 2018. The rebate from Energy Trust is tied to the market, so

OPINION

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Today more people understand the wildfire risk posed by dense stands, crowded with shade tolerant species that provide ladder fuels, which transport ground fires into the canopy and cause the most severe disturbance to a forest.

Less attention has been paid to the effects on old growth, on botanical diversity, on native wildlife that require open stands and on water cap-

ture, discharge and in-stream flow within a watershed.

Closed, heavily stocked forests are threatening remnant large old trees with moisture deficits and increased fire risk, they typically have little or no understory vegetation and they block anywhere from 10-50 percent of precipitation from reaching the ground.

As a result, forests today provide less habitat to species that use open mature forests or understory vegetation for nesting, roosting and feeding including a range of wood-

peckers, bumblebees, butterflies and terrestrial snails. Closed forests also reduce forage for elk, deer and livestock often resulting in more grazing pressure on riparian areas and private rangeland.

Given the rapid advances in scientific understanding of forest ecosystems, the evolution of new forest management practices designed to advance restoration goals and the threat posed by current conditions and climate change, it’s imperative that we engage fully with the USFS and work together to

“bend the climate curve” and save our forests.

We need to engage with each other and commit to shared learning, agree to try things, monitor them and assess the results. We also need to respect the good work being done by scientists, consider the collective evidence and results available, and be willing to challenge isolated scientific results that merely confirm our existing beliefs or values.

Wallowa County was an early pioneer in collaboration

with the USFS starting with the Upper Joseph Creek Watershed back in October 2000. These collaborative processes continue at the county level through our Natural Resources Advisory Committee and through the Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative.

All of these are open public meetings and seek to consider the best available science (including local knowledge) in our deliberations and decisions. Anyone with an interest or concern about a project in Wallowa County is encour-

aged to engage with us.

Nils D. Christoffersen is executive director of Wallowa Resources in Enterprise.

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by *Gayle Forman*

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Groundbreaking BBQ
Join us for a meet and greet with Senator Hansell and Representative Barreto

Save the Date

When: Saturday, August 12, 2017
Where: Medical Parkway, Enterprise Across from Winding Waters Medical Clinic
Time: 10:00 a.m. Town Hall Meeting
11am to 1pm BBQ

Citizens of Wallowa County Welcome

Please join us for an exciting groundbreaking event to celebrate the construction of an integrated health service building and meet members of your State Legislature in a town hall-style meeting where Senator Hansell and Representative Barreto will give us a face-to-face update from Oregon's State Capitol and what's on the docket for the new biennium.

Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness
"Supporting Community Wellness"

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