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### Solar United Neighbors of Ohio will hold an informational session

By Scott Daniels



The search for alternative energy sources has become a more immediate concern, both on a global scale and for individual businesses and homeowners. Solar energy is one of the chief options in seeking to control energy costs and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Solar United Neighbors of Ohio will hold an informational session on solar energy on Thursday, Feb. 1 at 6:30 p.m. in the west conference room at the Wayne County Library in Wooster.

SUN Wayne County Solar Co-op, now in the formation and participant collection phase, is part of a statewide trend of assembling true collectives of homeowners and small business owners to achieve greater bargaining power when purchasing solar arrays, realizing economies of scale not available on an individual basis.

Stewart Mykrantz of the Wayne County Sustainable Energy Network said joining a co-op is one way to reduce the upfront costs of installing solar panels. "It's a way for people to come together to do this kind of project as a group, in which everyone benefits."

Working through a co-op doesn't mean the eventual solar solutions are one size fits all. "One key thing to keep in mind is that even though the purchase is made with the cost benefit of the co-op, each solar array is custom designed for each application," Mykrantz said. "The factors involved in designing an effective array of solar panels vary tremendously from application to application. Contractors work closely with each home or small business owner."

Building orientation, roof pitch, the desired output of energy and other factors are taken into account.

Is it possible to go off the electrical grid and self-generate enough power to run a house in our Midwestern climate? "Yes," Mykrantz said. "In fact this is happening in many locations around Ohio right now. Many Amish farms are using solar power for household use, charging batteries, barn lighting and other applications."

Addressing costs and return on investment in choosing a solar array for energy production, Mykrantz said a home consuming 12,000 kWh a year would need an array costing \$30,000 at full price.

Co-op membership would reduce this amount, and a 30-percent federal tax credit would further bring this cost down to near \$20,000.

"These are very general numbers, but a typical payback period is somewhere around 12-15 years. After that, you would have your costs for electricity covered for the life of the array."

Solar power can be a very effective option for small business owners as they would have the added benefit of depreciating the investment, according to Mykrantz.

At the Feb. 1 information session, attendees will be able to ask questions of organizers and solar contractors about the co-op organization, financial incentives available, tax credits and array sizing.

Registration for the event is free at [www.wcsen.org](http://www.wcsen.org). Click "register for free here."

To learn about active solar co-ops with both ongoing and closed projects, visit [www.solarunitedneighbors.org](http://www.solarunitedneighbors.org). Choose Ohio from the drop-down menu, then "go solar in Ohio," then choose Wayne County.

According to information provided by the newly forming co-op, "Solar United Neighbors expands access to solar by educating communities about the benefits of distributed solar energy, helping them organize group solar installations, and by strengthening solar policies and communities of solar supporters. Solar United Neighbors has worked with a dozen solar co-ops in Ohio, helping more than 150 Ohio homes go solar, saving Ohio residents roughly \$520,000."



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