



COMMUNITY VOICES

It's time to turn on the sun in Volusia County

By Suze Peace and Nancy Vaughn

Every day the sun rises over Volusia County and soon more solar panels will be glinting it back and producing energy on the roofs of residents. Yes, a new opportunity has arisen, because today the entire county will become one giant solar co-operative! Volusia County is the 16th county in Florida to have such a co-op, with more being started all the time. The League of Women Voters of Florida has partnered with nonprofit Florida Solar United Neighborhoods (FL SUN) to create these countywide solar co-ops to encourage the use of renewable energy in Florida, a process that is long overdue.

The Solar Energy Industries Association states that Florida ranks third in the country for solar potential, yet is 12th in the amount of solar installed. Why does Florida, the "Sunshine State" have only 14,000 solar roofs statewide, while New Jersey has 44,000?

FL SUN is here to help. A nationwide non-profit, it is qualified to guide co-op members through the solar process and help them save money. A co-op is a way for people to bundle their buying power. Co-op members get a bulk discount rate, saving up to 20 percent on their installations combined with a 30 percent federal tax credit that is available for going solar.

This is how it works.

Interested homeowners are invited to attend one of five information sessions held throughout the county. The first one is at 6 p.m. Sept. 20 at Stetson University. These information sessions educate people about solar roofs, what is involved, how much they cost, and how much can be saved on their electric bills.

Co-op members choose the installer based on their own list of priorities and a vetting process by FL SUN experts.

FL SUN works as a neutral third-party consumer advocate working with both the group members and the chosen installer to ensure the process goes smoothly.

There is no pressure to buy, and contracts are signed on an individual basis.

Several important laws in Florida enable citizens to take advantage of solar energy. First, there is neither added property tax nor sales tax on a residential solar roof. Second, homeowner associations (HOAs) may not prevent anyone from adding solar roof panels.

Third, power companies in Florida are required by law to buy back unused power from their customers with solar, called net metering.

The Volusia countywide solar co-op is a win-win.

A ripple effect of economic development in the field of sustainable energy is about to unfold. Additionally, there is absolutely NO cost to the county nor the cities and great savings for the citizens. Now is the time to “turn on the sun.”

Please go to www.flsun.org/volusia/ to find out more.

Peace and Vaughn are co-chairs of the Solar and Water Action Team League of Women Voters of Volusia County.



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