

Grant to help area residents with solar power

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VENICE — Gulf Coast Community Foundation is warming up another grant project - this one to help Solar United Neighbors expand clean energy for Sarasota County.

Called "SUN," it uses a \$30,000 grant for two new solar co-ops in residential areas, the foundation said in a news release. It will allow neighbors to "affordably install quality rooftop solar-energy systems at a group rate. The funding also will allow SUN to expand its youth education and community outreach programs, work with local governments to reduce barriers to going solar, and assist more businesses interested in converting to solar energy," the news release said.

SUN works nationally in 11 states and Washington D.C. Gulf Coast Community Foundation had a grant in 2016 that has gone from two co-ops to 56 in Florida, with two co-ops in Sarasota County involving 100 households. The foundation says the \$1.9 million investment has saved those homeowners about \$3.4 million in energy costs versus buying electricity.

"Gulf Coast Community Foundation's longtime support has been instrumental in the success of our solar co-ops," Angela DeMonbreun said in a news release.

DeMonbreun is regional field director for Solar United Neighbors.

"They have provided us with cost and learning benefits that wouldn't otherwise be available," she said. "There's still a great demand for solar co-ops in the Sarasota area, and this grant will enable us to continue meeting it."

The news release said the two new SUN co-ops each may have room for up to 200 members with

September seen as the three-month sign-up period for the next co-op, the news release said.

Community partners and volunteers are being recruited in July and August.

DeMonbreun said the organization has adapted to COVID-19 with virtual volunteer trainings and information sessions.

SUN is working with installers to ensure safety protocols are followed, it said.

"When it comes to going solar, you can get pretty far in the process from the comfort and safety of home," she said. "And with the proven financial benefits of going solar, plus the scheduled loss of the solar investment tax credit for residential projects in 2022, now might be an especially attractive time for households to invest in solar energy."

Gulf Coast Community Foundation officials said SUN "complements other foundation projects focused on sustainability and environmental conservation."

"We love the way Solar United Neighbors has scaled its co-op model across our state," said Mark Pritchett, president and CEO of Gulf Coast Community Foundation. "Responding to climate change and improving environmental quality are two important priorities for our region, and SUN is empowering residents to address them at the individual and community levels."

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