

February 21, 2017

Go Solar, Sanibel! Learn the latest about solar energy

Two island organizations are pairing up to host “Go Solar, Sanibel!” -- a program about solar energy for island residents and businesses. The League of Women Voters of Sanibel and the Green Team of the Sanibel Congregational United Church (SCUCC) of Christ will bring James M. Fenton, Ph.D., the director of the Florida Solar Energy Center (FSEC), to Sanibel to talk about recent changes in the market that are making solar energy less costly. The program will be at 6PM on Monday, March 27, at the SCUCC, 2050 Periwinkle Way, on Sanibel. Admission is free.

Dr. Fenton’s presentation, “Florida Solar State of the Market,” was a hit at the recent Everglades Coalition Conference. He has been director of the University of Central Florida’s FSEC since January 2005. He leads a staff of 85 in the research and development of energy technologies that enhance Florida's and the nation's economy and environment and educate the public, students and practitioners on the results of the research. FSEC, created in 1975 by the Florida Legislature to serve as the state’s energy research institute, is the nation’s largest and most active state-supported renewable energy and energy efficiency research institute. Dr. Fenton also is a professor in the university’s Materials Science and Engineering Department.

Following this keynote presentation, John Lambie, the executive director of the Florida House Institute, will speak about the solar co-operative that he and others formed in Sarasota and how they reduced the Florida House energy bill to zero. The Florida House was the first “green” building open to the public in the U.S. This house and its surrounding garden integrate scientific principles and sustainable living practices. The Florida House Institute’s goal is to promote and advance sustainable practices that improve the quality of life for people in Florida’s Gulf Coast.

The final presentation of the evening will be the story about Bailey’s General Store going solar, as told by Richard Johnson. The solar installation was part of an overall “kilowatt diet” for the retail operation.

Bailey’s was one of four businesses/organizations on Sanibel Island that participated in the San-Cap Solar Connect program, initiated by the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) in 2015 to offer affordable solar conversion to area residents and businesses. Sanibel-Captiva Community Bank and SCCF also converted under the program, and the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge will be completing its conversion this year. An additional 24 residential homes converted, including Fred and Alice Stanback, who provided partial funding for the initiative.

"I am very pleased with my solar installation," said Fred Stanback. "For the first 10 months it has produced more power than we have used, so that my only electric bill has been the \$20.34 monthly fee to be connected to the grid."

San-Cap Solar ran its program through March 15, 2016, and then met with the League of Women Voters, who stepped in to continue the program [Florida-wide. “This is exciting and wonderful to see how our small program has now moved statewide and maybe even nationwide if it goes well,” said Birgie Miller, DDWS executive director].

Information on solar co-operatives and tax credits will be available for residents and business owners who attend the “Go Solar, Sanibel!” event.

For more information, contact Barbara Joy Cooley at lwvsanibel@gmail.com.