

PRESS RELEASE



For immediate release

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Caption: DDWS launched the state's first community solar co-op in 2015 to benefit the "Ding" Darling Visitor & Education Center and maintenance garage plus a number of residential and commercial buildings throughout the islands.

DDWS supports new Southwest Florida solar co-op

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) is partnering with Solar United Neighbors (SUN), a non-profit co-op whose purpose is to provide residents and businesses in Lee and Collier County with collective buying power to affordably convert to solar energy.

Based on the prior success of its SanCap Solar Connect campaign in 2015, DDWS has firm faith in community solarization efforts. It joins SCCF (Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation), the Sanibel & Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce, Bailey's General Store, and other island factions in its support.

"SanCap Connect was the first community-wide solarize program in Florida," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. "Thanks to its success, we were able to convert the Visitor & Education Center and maintenance garage to solar. Hurricane Ian, however, blew away most of the solar panels, and now we also are building the new The Roost outdoor learning pavilion in an earth-friendly way. It makes sense for us to join in the SUN efforts, and we urge all local business owners and homeowners to do the same."

Solar United Neighbors recently announced the launch of the Southwest Florida 2023 Solar Co-op. The recent impacts of Hurricane Ian have highlighted the urgency to help homeowners rebuild a more resilient community. Rooftop solar, when paired with battery storage, can help power homes and lifesaving equipment during power outages.

A brief launch announcement will occur on Tuesday, January 17, at 12 noon during the SWFL Climate & Community Summit at the Arthex One Conference Center in Naples. SUN's Gulf Coast program associate will be at the event to answer questions about going solar and to share experiences.

"The co-op will enable Southwest Florida homeowners and business owners to join the growing community of people saving money by harnessing solar power," said Julia Herbst, Gulf Coast Program



Associate for Solar United Neighbors. “We recognize and appreciate the leadership [“Ding” Darling] with the original SanCap co-op.

Together, we’re building a movement to transform our electricity system into one that is cleaner, fairer, and shares its benefits more broadly. And with the ever-present threat of hurricanes, there’s never been a better time to strengthen the electricity grid.”

As Floridians continue to rebuild and recover from this past hurricane season, rooftop solar is one way consumers can rebuild more resilient communities and be prepared for the next storm. Solar panels can handle severe weather events and, if the homeowner also has battery storage, solar can keep critical appliances and medical devices up and running. Solar systems installed in hurricane zones are designed to withstand hurricane-force winds.

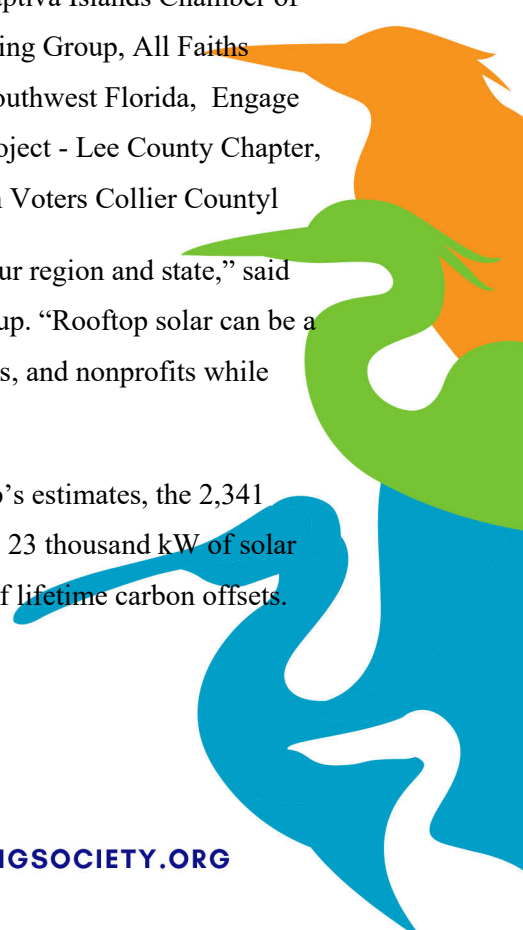
The SUN co-op is free to join and open to homeowners and business owners in Lee and Collier counties. Co-op members will learn about solar energy and leveraging their numbers to purchase individual solar systems at a competitive price and top quality.

After a competitive bidding process facilitated by SUN, which remains vendor-neutral, co-op members will select a single solar company to complete the installations. Joining the co-op does not obligate members to purchase solar. Instead, members will have the option to individually purchase panels and electric vehicle chargers based on the installer’s group rate.

Partnering on the co-op along with DDWS are the City of Sanibel, Sanibel-Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce, Bailey’s General Store, Sanibel-Captiva Renewable Energy Working Group, All Faiths Unitarian Congregation, Committee of the Islands (COTI), Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Engage Estero (formerly ECCL), Growing Climate Solutions, The Climate Reality Project - Lee County Chapter, SCCF (Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation), and the League of Women Voters Collier County

“Hurricane Ian is a strong reminder of how important energy resilience is to our region and state,” said Bob Moore, co-chair of the Sanibel-Captiva Renewable Energy Working Group. “Rooftop solar can be a part of the solution. Plus, it can save money for homeowners, businesses, cities, and nonprofits while keeping our air cleaner. It’s a no brainer!”

SUN has hosted 76 solar co-ops in Florida since 2015. According to the group’s estimates, the 2,341 homes and businesses that now have solar panels because of co-ops represent: 23 thousand kW of solar power, \$55 million in local solar spending, and more than 698.7 million lbs. of lifetime carbon offsets.



Protect. Educate. Inspire.



SANIBEL ISLAND
Friends of the Refuge

host free information sessions to educate community members about solar energy and the co-op. Individuals interested in going solar can sign up for the co-op or one of the upcoming information sessions at solarunitedneighbors.org/swfl.

ABOUT DDWS

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop profits.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

ABOUT SOLAR UNITED NEIGHBORS

Solar United Neighbors is a nonprofit organization that works in Florida and nationwide to represent the needs and interests of solar owners and supporters. Solar co-ops are part of the organization’s mission to create a new energy system with rooftop solar at the cornerstone. Solar United Neighbors holds events and education programs to help people become informed solar consumers, maximize the value of their solar investment, and advocate for fair solar policies.

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