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Colorado's Solar Garden Shines

By Lori K. Weinraub *Published: August 16, 2010 @ 2:06 pm* In Renewable Energy

Members of a Colorado co-op can now take advantage of solar energy without having to spend tens of thousands of dollars on a system or worrying whether their house has the proper sun exposure.



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Members of Holy Cross Energy own the panels in this solar array in El Jebel, Colo. (Photo By: Clean Energy Collective)

An 80-kilowatt community-owned solar garden operated by the Clean Energy Collective went on-line today in the service territory of Holy Cross Energy, Glenwood Springs.

The Mid-Valley Metro Array sold out the first week panels went on sale, with no advertising.

Between 18 and 20 individuals bought the 340 panels, at \$725 a panel after rebates and tax credits, said CEC founder Paul Spencer. Some bought as many as 80 panels, while others bought as few as one, in some cases to be given as gifts.

What makes this solar garden unique, Spencer said, is that CEC does all the work, handling everything from processing rebates and tax credits to tracking and applying credits to the members' electric bill to maintenance of the solar panels.

"This opens up clean energy ownership to absolutely everyone who has an electricity bill," Spencer said, noting that you don't have to be a homeowner to buy a panel, though you do have to be a Holy Cross member. At \$725 a panel, it will be paid off in 12 years, eight months, so anything Holy Cross Energy members earn after that is pure profit, Spencer said.

For Holy Cross, it's an innovative opportunity to participate in clean, green, local renewable energy generation via a system that will be perpetually maintained, said Stephen B. Casey, member services and marketing administrator.

"We're enthusiastic about the potential and value it offers our members," Casey said.

More opportunities for ownership will be available when the next solar garden in Holy Cross territory is built. Spencer says between 200 and 300 people will be able to buy into a 900-kw facility that should be on-line next summer.

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