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SustainAbility: Clean Energy Collective

By Adele Israel

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I first heard about the Clean Energy Collective last month at the 2010 Alliance for Sustainable Colorado Regional Sustainability Roundtable in Rifle.

It sounded intriguing, so I did a little research.

The collective provides a way to decrease your carbon footprint, combat climate change and save money on electricity, all in one fell swoop.

For residents of Roaring Fork and Vail valleys, the collective is an offer too good to refuse.

According to its website, the Carbondale-based collective is a "member-owned cooperative venture that builds and operates centralized clean power-generation facilities at the community level."

Founded by Roaring Fork native Paul Spencer, the energy collective has been compared to community gardens, only instead of growing food locally, they are generating electricity locally.

The collective has three goals:

1. Accelerate the adoption of long-term clean energy solutions (make them easier, cheaper, safer and longer lasting)
2. Provide utilities with lower risk, well-located and more beneficial clean energy generation (smart clean energy growth).
3. Create a manageable and mutually beneficial production partnership between utilities and consumers.

To get involved in this first of its kind effort, you must invest a minimum of \$500, but you can lower utility costs and make a move to electricity generated by renewable sources.

These sources include solar, wind, geothermal, biomass and micro-hydro systems.

In cooperation with local utilities, the collective builds and maintains medium-scaled clean energy facilities that are owned by you and your neighbors.

The collective is able to take advantage of the plethora of rebates, tax incentives and monthly power credits to keep costs low and members receive credits on their monthly electric bills.

A lifetime warranty comes with membership.

The collective works in conjunction with RemoteMeter, which "fully integrates with utility billing systems through a versatile integration engine," according to the collective's website. "It tracks and applies clean energy production credits directly on customer bills depending on the utility's policies, manages production surpluses and integrates with facility meters and meteorological data for real time production monitoring."

The collective has been busy installing a large solar array in El Jebel and has plans for installations in Snowmass and Garfield and Eagle counties. A proposed array at the Eagle County landfill near Dotsero covers 7 acres with 8,000 panels and will be one of the largest arrays in Colorado.

A May 2010 Solar Daily article quoted Steve Casey of Holy Cross Energy, which provides power to most Roaring Fork Valley consumers. "The CEC model provides a unique vehicle for our members to participate and enjoy the benefits of renewable energy generation," Casey said.

No projects for Mesa County are on the collective's drawing board, but our area is on its radar.

Spencer told me the Grand Valley is a "fantastic match with solar" and he wants to sit down with representatives from Grand Valley Power later this summer.

In Aspen Times article earlier this month, Spencer stated, "one of my goals is to eliminate every barrier to green energy."

Once the collective gets up and running in this area then we can "Join the Clean Energy Collective — member owned, nature operated."

Learn more at [http://www.clean \(http://www.clean\) energycollective.com](http://www.cleanenergycollective.com).

Adele Israel is a Grand Junction writer who has been involved in sustainability efforts for some 20 years. Have a question or column idea for Adele? E-mail her at [msdeli@bresnan.net \(mailto:msdeli@bresnan.net\)](mailto:msdeli@bresnan.net) .