

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Credit: Ken Burgener

SanCap Solar Connect fields strong response

SanCap Solar Connect, an initiative designed by “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) to save local residents time and money on solar energy conversion through collective buying power, reports a strong interest in its program from island residents and businesses.

“High participation levels promise to give us the ability to provide the highest quality products at the lowest possible cost,” said John McCabe, chair of the SanCap Solar Connect advisory and implementation committees. “We’ve had close to 200 interested parties sign up for a free solar evaluation already.”

For Sanibel homeowners Douglas McLemore and Judith Rittenhouse, signing on with SanCap Solar Connect was a “no-brainer.” They had been considering solar to lower electric bills and had already started researching the possibility.

“This came along and it was exactly what we were looking for,” McLemore said. “We were very impressed with the amount of work this volunteer organization had done. They took a lot of the guesswork out of it because they knew what they were doing. They saved us time by interviewing, researching, and finding the best quality installers and materials. Plus there’s the significant discount because of volume purchasing.”

The part-time Sanibel couple saw installation begin in December, in time to file for the federal solar energy credit on 2015 taxes. After recently returning to the island during last week's rain events, McLemore commented: "We did watch the monitoring tool for the few hours yesterday that the sun was out, and it was good to see electricity being generated. The process couldn't have been easier for part-timers like us, who don't always have great luck finding contractors," he added. "It provided a lot of comfort."

Full-time Sanibel islander Ken Burgener agrees. "'Ding' Darling did all the brainwork," he said. "That was the selling point. For a private person to go out and talk to 10 or 15 contractors, you're going to get 10 or 15 different answers."

Urban Solar Group, the contractor selected by DDWS' vetting committee, recently installed the solar system in four days on Burgener's Rabbit Road home earlier this month. Now he's waiting for LCEC to activate the meter.

"They told me seven to eight years for the payback on my investment," said Burgener, who was the third resident to have a SanCap Solar Connect system installed. "But it's not just about the money. It's about saving energy and keeping Sanibel green."

In addition to McCabe, the SanCap Solar Connect advisory committee that vetted contractors consists of Dr. Joseph H. Simmons, director of renewable energy research at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU); Richard Johnson, Bailey's General Store; and Mark Anderson, Benchmark General Contractors.

Islanders can go online at www.SanCapSolarConnect.org to easily sign up for a free evaluation and to find more information. The web site's FAQ page answers the most common questions about the program and solar energy.

Interested parties can also contact program coordinator Joyce Lathrop at jlathrop@sancapsolar.org or 239-940-8931 for more information and to request a solar analysis.

Based on the success of a number of initiatives in other states, SanCap Solar Connect is the first-ever community-driven solarize program in Florida. The SanCap Solar Connect initiative was made possible partially through funding from solar advocates Fred and Alice Stanback.

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 proceeds.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit www.dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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