

THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Monday, Mar. 08, 2010

Bellingham company completing largest solar project in state

ISABELLE DILLS - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Each week The Bellingham Herald takes a closer look at a business. This week: Western Solar.

What it is: Western Solar provides residential and commercial solar electric, solar hot water, small wind systems and solar space heating systems in Washington state.

Co-owners Jack Hardy and Josh Miller are often asked if solar works in Washington, and the answer, they say, is yes.



COURTESY | FOR THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

"We get 70 percent as much sun (per year) as southern California," Miller said. "And we get 20 percent more than Germany, which has the highest solar consumption of any country."

What's new: Western Solar is completing the state's largest thin-film solar electric system. The system is part of the newly constructed Lakota Middle School in Federal Way. The 37-kilowatt system, which is 10 times the normal solar electric system for a residential house, consists of 272 thin film panels that are laminated to the school's roof. The panels are only 0.02-inch thick.

Ownership: Western Solar is owned by Hardy and Miller. Hardy taught environmental science at Western Washington University from 1989 to 2003. In 2002, he started Prime Consultants Inc., which built energy-efficient homes in Whatcom County.

Hardy joined forces with Miller one year ago. Miller previously worked for Alpha Technologies in Bellingham for two years. Before moving to Bellingham, he managed a solar company in Arizona for three years.

Product benefits: The incentives for installing a solar electric system are numerous, Hardy said. Any solar electricity produced by the system that is unused turns into credit and reduces the monthly electric bill. Most of that credit is earned during the summer months when more solar electricity is being produced than used.

"All summer long, you're building credit," Miller said. "When fall and winter hits, you use up the credits from the summer."

Customers also receive an annual production payment of 15 cents or more per kilowatt hour -or 36 cents per kilowatt hour for film panels made in Washington State - for all the electricity the system produces. For the average homeowner, Miller said that can mean a yearly check of about \$600 - or \$1,200 if the panels are made in the state.

One of the biggest incentives for going solar is that residential property owners receive a federal tax credit for 30 percent of the total installed cost of the solar electric system, Hardy said. Commercial property owners receive a similar incentive: a grant for 30 percent of the system's cost.

Western Solar

319 E. Champion St.

Bellingham, WA

(360)746-0859

westernwashingtonsolar.com.