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Cabinet company makes own power



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Quality Custom Woodworking gets most of its power from the sun, thanks to 4,000 square feet of panels on its roof, the largest array on a commercial building south of Denver.

By JOHN NORTON
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Charles and Cheri Bucciarelli are looking forward to their next electric bill and not having to pay more than the metering fee.

That's because since July, the power they've been using at their Quality Custom Woodworking factory on Pueblo's East Side has been coming directly from the sun.

Half of their roof is covered by solar panels, 4,000 square feet of them, that provide the power for their machinery, lights and other devices.

It's the largest commercial solar array south of Denver, according to Aquila officials, who worked with the Bucciarellis



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and Paul and Lori Huber of Eco Sol, the contractor that installed the system.

Since the passage of Amendment 37 in 2004, Aquila has been promoting solar power in its Pueblo service area in order to meet the law's mandated quota of renewable energy. The law says that 5 percent of Aquila's energy has to come from renewable sources.

Quality Custom Woodworking started out more than 20 years ago as a kitchen-cabinet maker and 10 years ago opened a larger factory at 1447 N. Erie to provide laminate-clad commercial cabinetry.

The Bucciarellis say they wanted to convert to solar for a long time, just to make a smaller impact on the environment. But it took Amendment 37 and other state and federal incentives to make it possible from a business standpoint.



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/CHRIS McLEAN

Eco Sol electrician Lori Huber explains the solar energy system her company has installed at Quality Custom Woodworking.

Businesses that set up solar systems can receive a lump-sum payment from Aquila of about \$4.50 per watt generated. In the Bucciarellis' case, their 45-kilowatt system earned about \$202,500 toward offsetting the price of the solar system, which runs between \$8 and \$10 per watt, according to Kenny Romero, Aquila's renewable energy manager. After that, a federal tax credit can recover about 30 percent of the balance.

The real savings, according to Huber, is what the customer no longer pays for power. If, over a year's time, the system generates more power than is needed to supplement it off the grid, Aquila will pay the customer 3.8 cents per kilowatt hour. Huber said that's not the goal of a solar system, which usually tries to balance usage, but it is an extra incentive.

Charles Bucciarelli said that he expects to recover his out-of-pocket cost for the system in five years. The system has a



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life expectancy of 35 years "so I'm getting free power for 30 years," he said.

That's a sizeable savings. Cheri Bucciarelli said that power bills run from \$1,200 to \$1,400 a month for the Erie building.

Her husband added, "Yes it's saving money but it's about environmental stewardship."

Romero agreed, saying, "Charles and Cheri have taken a real leadership role. They could have done a lot of things with this money."

The system, Huber explained, is a grid-tied one. Unlike most residential systems, which use batteries, there is no storage capacity at the Bucciarellis' building. Power generated from the solar panels goes into inverters and is converted from direct to alternating current and then fed into meters that measure the total amount. The building takes its share and anything extra goes to the grid through a net meter that measures how much surplus power the system sends out and how much power is used if the solar system isn't providing enough for all the demand.

Huber said that the capacity was based on a model generating 102 percent of the building's needs so it would be self-sufficient and not need outside power. On weekends and after work when the sun is shining, it's pretty much all surplus and earning wholesale payments for the business.

Bucciarelli stressed that it was a team effort and credited Romero with not only helping to get the company make the deal work but also increasing energy efficiency with recommendations for new lighting and other power uses.

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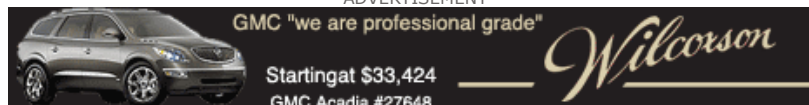
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