

Neighborhood Solar Aggregation Portola Valley Ranch

After a group of Portola Valley Ranch residents returned from viewing Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, they met to discuss what to do in response and decided to pool together to bulk-purchase solar. Armand Neukermans, a Portola resident who was named Silicon Valley's Inventor of the Year in 2001, became an informal leader to help neighbors work with local solar installers. "We approached five or six different companies and asked them for a discount. [Solar installer] SolarCity was the only one that expressed interest," Neukermans said. Portola Valley Ranch became the first Bay Area community to participate in SolarCity's Community Solar Program.



Portola Valley Ranch Solar Community

SolarCity offered Portola Valley residents a 30% discount if enough local homes would commit, between October and December of 2006, to install a total of 175 kW of solar electricity.

"We did our own recruiting," said Neukermans. "Portola Valley Ranch is a development of 200 homes. We all have each others' email addresses, so we didn't have to do much to organize."

SolarCity also organized meetings in the town over two or three evenings. Neukermans said SolarCity's community organizers "actually went out of their way to explain that PV is expensive. They made it very clear that energy efficiency may be a better investment. But people like PV. It's a symbol that you can see."

Though the community as a whole qualified for discounted prices, sales contracts were tailored to individual households since prices varied slightly based on each building's roof. Eventually, 78 homes installed a total of 340 kW of solar.



A solar home in Portola Valley

The Portola Valley community is finding that additional steps are now easier. "Other vendors know about us. They'll say, 'Look, we have a product that we would like to talk about.' Then we'll organize a community meeting about it."

Neukermans credits community with this success. "We did something together that's not really going to happen by individual action. Solving climate change is sort of like a war effort. I think we're going to get there. We're still finding our way to identify what we can do."



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