



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SUNWORK

SunWork Renewable Energy Projects, a nonprofit solar installation company, trains volunteers to install solar panels on homes in the South Bay Area. The organization, dedicated to spreading a clean, renewable alternative to the usual energy sources, provides free labor for small homes with a minimal energy footprint that qualify for the service. SunWork volunteers completed an installation on a Sunnyvale home in February.

Volunteers complete first 'solar build' in Sunnyvale

By TIFFANY CARNEY

A new kind of nonprofit group made its debut in Sunnyvale last month armed with solar panels.

SunWork Renewable Energy Projects, a South Bay nonprofit dedicated to spreading solar power with the help of trained volunteers, completed its first "solar build" in Sunnyvale. The group, similar to Habitat for Humanity, which provides volunteer labor for home builds, trains volunteers to install solar panels on homes that qualify for service.

While the group launched last year, Ginger Wolnik is the first Sunnyvale resident who qualified for the program. Wolnik said she was interested in a solar energy system at her home when she stumbled upon SunWork.

"I liked their philosophy of trying to help people have affordable power, especially small-home owners," she said.

Wolnik's home was the

second project completed by the organization.

Volunteers make it possible for SunWork to make solar energy more affordable by offering eligible homeowners, those who use a minimal amount of electricity, a rate for materials and permits only, labor excluded. The photovoltaic systems, installed by SunWork, transform direct sunlight into electricity.

"I think it's a bad use of electricity when you have sun shining on your house and you are not producing electricity," Wolnik said.

The service is offered to those who are environmentally conscious and make the effort to minimize their electricity usage, but might not be able to afford a large solar energy system.

The systems installed by SunWork, a licensed solar contractor, supplement electricity from a main power grid, allowing a home to use less energy provided from Pacific Gas and Electric.

This results in a lower bill at the end of the month.

"With SunWork, we strive to install solar electricity systems more inexpensively, to allow more people to afford these systems, to spread solar power widely—through the resource of the actions of individuals," its website says.

PG&E swapped Wolnik's meter out for another that could calculate solar energy, and she began using her photovoltaic system March 2.

"At least it's something I can do to reduce my carbon footprint," Wolnik said. In addition to the state and federal tax credit, Wolnik is anxious to see how much money she will save with the alternative energy system.

"This is almost like a game to see how low my bill can go," she said. According to Wolnik's calculations, the system will pay for itself in about seven years.

"On the days where there is more power being gener-

Sunwork, page 10