

Store Solar Panels Installed

Gift & Thrift Project Supports MCC Mission

By PETE DeLEA Daily News-Record

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HARRISONBURG — Tim Godshall spent several hours Saturday morning helping to install 150 solar panels on the roof of the Harrisonburg Gift & Thrift Store and another nearby building.



Figure 1: PC - Pete DeLea DN-R

The work on Saturday wrapped up a roughly eight-month project to help reduce the electric costs for the thrift shop, which is owned by the Mennonite Central Committee.

“I’m a supporter of Gift & Thrift and support the mission of their store, which includes environmental stewardship,” said the 40-year-old Harrisonburg resident.

Godshall was among 50 volunteers to help out Saturday at the store at 731 Mount Clinton Pike. Secure Futures, a solar energy development company in Staunton, led the project.

Amory Fischer, Secure Futures’ program coordinator, said more volunteers showed up than expected. Fischer said he believed they saw the project as a way to help the environment and a local charity at the same time.

“This is a direct way they can take action,” said Fischer, adding that this project also sends a message that the community wants to make a push toward clean energy. “We want to make our voices heard.”

The most direct benefit from adding the panels, according to Secure Futures estimates, will be an estimated savings of about \$14,000 a year in electricity costs, Fischer said.

In March, MCC received a \$50,000 grant to help complete the solar energy project at Gift & Thrift, which generates \$300,000 a year for the committee. MCC uses the money in the humanitarian work it does throughout the world.

The grant is funded through the U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative's Solar in Your Community Challenge.

In 2015, the project got off the ground when local Voluntary Gas Tax members donated \$5,000 from money being generated by the contributors' self-imposed 50-cents-a-gallon "tax" on the gasoline they purchase.

In November, about 30 volunteers installed 180 panels on the store's roof to complete the first phase of work.

Shannon Secrist, Gift & Thrift general manager, is grateful to see the work completed.

"I'm overwhelmed by the volunteer support," Secrist said. "It speaks to how much people care about our environment and organization."

Part of the \$50,000 grant also will go toward a solar power project at MCC East Coast Material Resources Center in Ephrata, Pa.

The funds also cover feasibility studies to establish solar power systems at three additional MCC locations, which have not been chosen.

MCC officials said it plans to use Secure Futures to oversee the installation for all five projects.

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