

## Interest in energy sustained

Valley residents, institutions still choosing 'green' power systems.

*By Miller Resor, Jackson Hole, Wyo.  
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The year ahead is wrapped in hopes and fears. But weaved throughout is an idea that has become both global and local: renewable energy is laden with promise.

In fifth grade, Wilson native Will Roscoe designed a solar-paneled cowboy hat and presented it at the Wilson School's annual Invention Convention.

It was around that time that he started thinking about solar energy.

A month ago, Roscoe, now 24, packed his bags and moved to Culver City, Calif., to take a job installing solar panels on roofs around Los Angeles.

"It's going really well; we do a lot of work," he said in a phone interview.

A normal job takes about two days. He installs 15 to 20 solar panels and an inverter, and before the people inside know it, the solar array on top of their home is pumping out 3 kilowatt-hours of electricity.

"It's rewarding to build a power plant for somebody in only a couple days," he said.

Cruising around L.A. in a big green SolarCity van full of solar panels and dressed in a green cap and T-shirt, Roscoe often is stopped by strangers wanting to know about his work.

"People are really interested in it. It's cool to get to share what I know about it with people."

Roscoe said solar panels are about to get much cheaper because of new manufacturing techniques.

However, the incentive to install renewable energy systems in Wyoming is less than in a state like California.

Wyoming's average energy price is the lowest in the nation. California has more than 150 programs to make purchasing sustainable energies more affordable. Wyoming has about 15.

In spite of this, people are still buying renewable energy, said Andy Tyson, part owner of locally based Creative Energies. "They are doing it for other reasons."

For some it is a practical matter. Wyoming's vast open spaces often lack electrical grids, a reason some purchase renewable energies. Others want energy security, whether it be from skyrocketing prices or scarcity. It's also a way to protect the environment or support a growing industry.

Then there's those who are just interested. "Some people have the resources and/or the desire to apply new progressive ideas and building techniques," he said.

Creative Energies installs and consults on a number of different renewable energy systems.

The majority of the company's projects are solar electric, wind electric and geothermal heat pumps, but it has also installed hydroelectric systems, solar thermal water heaters and worked on passive solar houses.

"People in Wyoming appreciate people who can build something that will supply them with a source of energy," he said.

Tyson and his business partners Scott Kane and Toby Schmidt started Creative Energies in Lander eight years ago.

All three were trip leaders with the National Outdoor Leadership School and were looking to "transition."

Tyson took some classes at Colorado-based Solar Energy International, then worked with a man in the Northwest who had 20 years of experience in the field of renewable energies.

Tyson credits the renewable energy community for being very welcoming, willing to teach and lend a hand.

"We all welcome new people because we want to see the industry grow," he said.

Now the company has headquarters in Victor and Lander, a growing staff and has been contracted by the Town of Jackson for three major solar installations, one of which will be the largest solar array in the state.

The town took a big step in promoting renewable energies when Mayor Mark Barron signed The U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement in 2006. As a result, the County, Town and Community 10 x 10 Initiative and the Energy Efficiency Advisor Board were formed.

The county and town plan to cut their carbon footprint by 10 percent by 2010, and 180 members of the community have pledged to do the same

In 2008, Jackson received all of its electricity for the town's facilities from a single renewable power source. The Strawberry Creek Dam in Lincoln County creates more than 8.5 million kwh of electricity for Lower Valley Energy annually, and the town will buy most of it.

Lower Valley Energy also sells renewable energy to the community.

Residents of Jackson and surrounding areas can buy 100 percent of their energy through Lower Valley Energy from the Foote Creek Wind Project near Laramie at a slightly higher price.

Lower Valley Energy also offers Home Weatherization Incentives, Energy Audits, Residential Lighting, rebates on energy-saving appliances and water heaters, and up to \$3,000 for installing a geothermal pump.

Brian Tanabe works for Lower Valley Energy and is on the steering committee of the Community 10x10 Initiative.

"The technology on the geothermal pumps is phenomenal, just incredibly efficient," he said.

The entire Wilson School is heated with geothermal pumps.

Renewable energy sources are becoming much more commonplace, but to really battle carbon footprints the responsibility will fall on the individual, he said.

"People don't really read their energy bills," Tanabe said. "If we can just get people to understand their energy bills, it would be a huge step."

The Community 10x10 Initiative now has a radio show called Lights Out and is going to start a book club to help create more awareness in the community. Tanabe said there would be several events throughout the year as well.

The town is doing much to achieve these goals, said Larry Pardee, director of Public Works and the man who helped spark the initiative.

But without community support and involvement it won't fix the problem, he said.

"Every day you choose how much energy you are going to use," Pardee said. "Choose wisely. You have to stop and decide how you are going to live your life."