

Local sustainability leader finds forecast sunny for solar

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GLEN CARBON – Sheila Voss makes a smoothie in her blender this morning, and the small appliance she’s using will soon be powered by the sun. Voss, Vice President of Education at the Missouri Botanical Garden, is adding solar panels to her home through the [Solarize Madison County / Glen Carbon](#) program. Over 200 individuals have signed up for more information from the Solarize Madison County / Glen Carbon program since it began in March. Like Sheila, most of them have attended a presentation called a

Solar Power Hour to learn about how solar technology works and how much it costs. The program allows individual home and commercial property owners to access lower prices for solar installations through the power of volume purchasing.

"The Solarize Madison County program came at a perfect time for us" said Voss. "Since moving into this house in 2002, we've made investments in things like energy efficient windows and window treatments, attic insulation, and appliance upgrades. We've also planted trees, trees, and more trees, not only to beautify and biodiversity our yard, but also for the cooling effects of strategically placed trees. We've got kind of a unique set-up here, just over 2.5 acres with a section of short-grass prairie and savanna plants in our backyard enjoying full sun exposure. Our multi-panel solar unit will be the newest



addition to our prairie garden!"

The first of these presentations had 75 attendees. "That's the most successful turnout I've seen for one of these programs," said Peter Murphy, Solar Program Manager for Midwest Renewable Energy Association, a nonprofit that promotes renewable energy across the region through consumer and professional trainings and programs like Solarize Madison County / Glen Carbon. "We've done ten of these Solar Group Buy Programs around Wisconsin and Illinois, and this one is off to a very strong start," he added.

Already, seven homeowners have signed contracts for solar arrays, with the first being installed a few weeks ago on a home in Edwardsville. The customer financed with a Home Equity Line of Credit. "That array should produce around 9,300 kWh in the first year, saving the homeowner about \$982 on their electric bills," said Heidi Schoen, Assistant Director of Business Development for StraightUp Solar, the solar installer providing all the site assessments and installations for the program.

"One of our motivations is to continue reducing our footprint," said Voss. "We still drive a lot to get to and from work, but we're trying to do everything we can. We compost, we adjust our thermostat, we don't buy bottled water, we grow a lot of our own food, things like that. But this investment is bigger than that. It's about pushing us -

people, consumers, markets, policies - to that tipping point. As consumers, we have incredible influence and impact. The more ubiquitous and in-demand renewables get, the quicker we'll get to a clean-energy community and world."

The Village of Glen Carbon and Madison County Planning and Development Department together have supported the stand-alone bulk solar group purchase program for residents, businesses, and organizations in Madison County. The program will reduce carbon emissions while providing residents, commercial property owners, farmers, and nonprofits with the opportunity to invest in their own high quality renewable energy solar installation with potentially significant savings on installation cost, and energy bills.

"We see a lot of alignment between our goals for the community and what this program can deliver," said Chris Krusa, volunteer from Glen Carbon Cool Cities Committee. "By lowering our carbon footprint and becoming more energy independent, we can improve the quality of life for Madison County residents."

The program's website includes a sign-up form which will be used to announce future Solar Power Hour sessions: SolarizeMCGC.com. The next Solar Power Hour will take place on Tuesday 5/16/2017 at 6:00 PM at Louis Latzer Memorial Public Library, 1001 9th St, Highland, IL 62249.

There are special opportunities for farms as well through the USDA Renewable Energy for America (REAP) program. To help interested farm families learn more about their opportunities, the Madison County Farm Bureau is hosting a special information session on July 10 at 7:30pm at Madison County Farm Bureau, 900 Hillsboro Ave., Edwardsville, IL.

If you have additional questions, please contact Peter Murphy, Solar Program Manager at Midwest Renewable Energy Association at peterm@midwestrenew.org.