



Is solar power right for you?

BY TOM TATE



For many folks, the use of solar panels to generate electricity is a recent technological development. When we think of photovoltaic (PV) solar panels, images of early NASA vehicles in outer space immediately come to mind. Indeed, America's first permanent satellite, Explorer I, was powered by PV panels in 1958.

However, the use of solar energy dates back to 1767 when a Swiss scientist named Horace-Benedict de Saussure built an insulated, glass-faced box, generating temperatures of up to 230 degrees from sunlight. His invention was dubbed the "solar oven."

Fast-forward to today, and nearly everyone is aware of solar. Yet, PV has remained one of the most expensive forms of electricity. People always ask why this is the case when the fuel is "free." It's because the equipment is expensive, and the sun doesn't always shine. While equipment prices have dropped dramatically, the output of commercially available panels ranges from 5 to 19 percent (15 percent is common) of the theoretical limit, assuming there were never clouds and the sun was at high noon 24 hours a day.

So, is solar electricity right for you? The short answer is,

"It depends." How's that for an ambiguous answer? But it truly does depend on a number of factors. The first thing you should consider is why you want to go solar. If it is for backup power in an emergency, stop here. PV systems are tied to the grid for safety reasons. When the power goes out, the PV array shuts down. If it is for environmental reasons, read on.

Your next step is to contact an energy expert to discuss your plan. Talk to your energy expert, and let them help you decide what makes the most sense for your home. A south-facing roof is typically the preferred direction for the placement of solar panels. Do trees shade the roof at any time? Next to darkness, shade is the natural enemy of solar panels. Is your roof structure capable of accepting the weight of the panels and any other load, say wind and snow? Are there any neighborhood or local regulations prohibiting solar panels?

Now to the nitty gritty. Grab your electric bills from the past year and see how many kilowatt-hours (KWH) your home has used. Your electric provider can assist with this task. The typical American home PV system produces 5 KWH per hour. How much of your home's annual use can be covered?

Then comes the cost. The 5-KWH system has an average cost of \$24,650 before any incentives. The most common incentive is a 30 percent tax credit from the federal government. Then there are savings in reduced energy use costs and the potential benefit of any electricity sold back to your electric utility company. Calculations have shown paybacks between seven and 15 years.

If you decide to talk to a contractor, be sure to check references. Increased interest in solar has spawned a large number of sellers who have little knowledge in PV installations. Caveat emptor, or sold as is, is the rule to obey here. (Meter 30253) ■



Sunrise Festival of the Arts celebrating 25th year

The Sunrise Festival of the Arts is a mainstay of Sidney, Mont., celebrating its 25th year in 2015! The Festival takes place in Veterans Memorial Park from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. every year on the second Saturday in July. This year's event will be July 11.

Annually, the Sunrise Festival of the Arts brings a unique blend of music, food, theater and writing, as well as a wide variety of arts and crafts, attracting thousands of visitors to the community.

More than 60 local and regional

artisans working in every medium imaginable use the Festival to present and sell their wares. From bath products to bronze sculptures and woodworking to watercolors, there is sure to be something that appeals to everyone. Additionally, a featured artisan's work is showcased leading up to and during the Festival.

Authors from across the country also take advantage of the opportunity to present themselves and their writing to the public when participating in the Sunrise Festival. Each author has the chance to appear on stage for a short reading, and has their own booth in which to make sales, talk about their work or answer questions from budding authors.

Many entertainers, including musicians, singers and dancers, perform through the duration of the event, which brings joy and delight to adults and kids alike. Participants from the Footlights and Greasepaint Theatre Retreat help to man the Kids' Corner, which provides an educational, interactive and artistic venue for children throughout the day. Additionally, the Sidney-Richland County Library offers fun crafts for children at the event.

Admission to the festival is free. However, if you purchase a button, which is specially designed each year for the Festival, you are registered for great door prizes that are given away all day long. The grand prize is a piece of art created specifically for the Sunrise Festival of the Arts by that year's featured artist.

For more information about the Sunrise Festival of the Arts, please contact the Sidney Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture at 406-433-1916 or at info.chamber@sidneymt.com.



Vitt wins MECA scholarship

The Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA), along with Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC), congratulates Faith Vitt, this year's winner of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association memorial scholarship. MECA's scholarship is worth \$500 and LYREC is matching the scholarship for a total scholarship of \$1,000.

Faith is the daughter of Steven and Cynthia Vitt, Fairview, Mont. Faith is planning to attend the University of Montana in the fall. Faith has been active in FFA, Math Club, Science Club, volleyball, basketball, and track and field. She has also served her community through her volunteer experiences and has been a member of the National Honor Society throughout her high school years.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to apply for the MECA scholarship. If you were not selected this year, you may apply again next year.

Congratulations, Faith! ■

**Join us at the Richland County
Fairgrounds Thursday, Aug. 6,
for a free root beer float!
Starting at 4 p.m.**

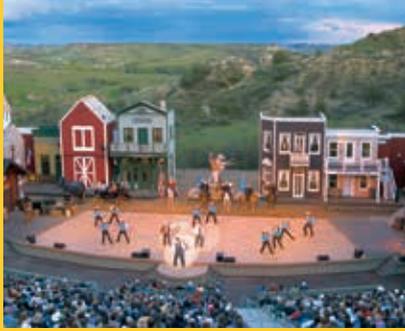
CO-OP Day at the Fair

Sponsored by:

- Lower Yellowstone REA
- Richland Federal Credit Union
- Nortana Grain
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- Cenex Harvest States
- Horizon Resources
- Northwest Farm Credit Services
- Richland Farm Mutual Insurance



Medora discount available



Are you planning a trip to Medora this summer? If you are, simply call 1-800-MEDORA-1 and give them the discount code of "Touch 2015" for

15 percent discount off the following during any night of the season:

Things to do:

- Medora Musical
- Pitchfork Steak Fondue
- Bully Pulpit Golf Course

Lodging at any of the following:

- Bunkhouse Motel
- Badlands Motel
- Rough Riders Hotel

Members can also receive 20 percent off at the Cowboy Hall of Fame by providing the discount code "Touch 2015" at the door. ■

Call before you dig!

Planting a tree? Installing a fence? Digging at all? Contact the One Call Center first! The first step to any project is safety, and damaging an underground facility while you dig can cause injury or even death.

Numerous utility lines may be buried on your property, ranging from electric and telephone lines to water and sewer lines, but the One Call Center will help you locate these lines before your project begins.

Contact the One Call Center and utility line owners will locate and mark their lines. These locates do not include any lines you may have installed to your private facilities, such as detached garages, wells or yard lights.

Simply call 811. It's free and it's the law!



Kyle Kavanagh

New staff

Kyle Kavanagh is Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative's new information technology coordinator. Kyle grew up in the Flathead area and has resided in Sidney, Mont., for the past four years.

He graduated from Montana Tech with a degree in information technology and design. Kyle has been employed with Erickson Contract Surveying for the past four years.

Kyle enjoys camping, hiking and running in his free time. ■

HIDDEN NUMBERS

If you find your meter number hidden in this issue, it is worth a \$25 credit on your next statement. The meter number will appear within the four Lower Yellowstone Electric pages. Give us a call during the month your meter is listed, and claim your \$25 bill credit.



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