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Commitment to Green Energy Earns Awards



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke, who was honored with the Sunshine Award from GRID Alternatives, and Perris Mayor Michael Vargas, at the May 18 "solarbration" in Riverside. The Mayor accepted an award on behalf of the City of Perris as the Public Partner of the Year.

The City of Perris took home a pair of awards that exemplify the community's commitment to solar energy.

Mayor Michael Vargas accepted the award from GRID Alternatives as the Public Partner of the Year at a May 18 ceremony in Riverside. The award recognizes Perris' commitment to installing solar panels on residential rooftops, which has made the City "one of the fastest growing solar communities in the Inland Empire."

More than 70 Perris homes have converted in recent months to solar energy and more are expected to let the sunshine in the coming months. GRID Alternatives works to expand solar-usage and to make renewable energy technology and job training accessible to underserved communities.

In addition, Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke, who has taken part in several solar-panel installation projects, won the Sunshine Award "in gratitude for your leadership and support" of promoting sustainable energy.

Burke has climbed single and two-story roofs to install panels, overcoming her fear of heights and took part in an all-female solar-panel installation.

Bambi Tran, regional director of GRID Alternatives of the Inland Empire, praised the City for spreading the news about solar, which included notifying residents about the potential savings from solar power in their monthly electric bills. Members of the City's Youth Advisory Committee have also helped install solar collection systems.

"These awards are a big deal," Tran said. "Perris is to be commended for its strong and phenomenal relationship in bringing solar and job training to the City. I'm impressed by that commitment."

Going Green

The Perris accolades were part of a ceremony that honored other partners working with GRID Alternatives to reduce electric bills, address climate change, provide job-training skills and reduce greenhouse gases. The solar energy business is growing by 15 to 20 percent a year and installers are in great demand. Tran said solar-panel installers can earn from \$14 to \$20 per hour to start.

"Part of our mission is to train solar-related employees," she said.

Mayor Vargas heralded the City's commitment to solar energy as "tremendous for our City."

"We are re-educating the community about the benefits of solar energy," Vargas said. "It's a great partnership. There's nothing like going green. It's the only way to go."

Vargas said he would like to see Perris businesses go solar in the future.

Burke said she was "truly honored and truly shocked to receive the Sunshine Award.

"I'm humbled and I'm appreciative," Burke said. "I'm 100 percent behind the City's commitment to going solar. It's environmentally conscience, provides jobs and job training for our residents and is a win-win for our City and its residents."

Burke said the recognition by GRID is further indication of Perris' commitment to embrace cutting-edge technology to improve the lives of its people. She noted that the Live Well Perris healthy-eating active-living program is encouraging wise food choices. The City's Green City Farm Program is expanding, with an ultimate goal of creating 30 community gardens within easy reach of all Perris residents.

"The City of Perris is leading the region in many ways," Burke said. "It's not surprising but it is gratifying."



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke holds her Sunshine Award from GRID Alternatives with Lisa Castilone, a sales manager and regional outreach coordinator who has managed several solar-panel installation projects in the City.



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas and his wife, Julie, chat with Bambi Tran, regional director of GRID Alternatives, at an award ceremony in which the City of Perris was honored for its commitment to bringing solar power to its residents.

Other GRID Alternatives honorees included:

- **Collaboration:** The Greater Riverside Chamber of Commerce
- **Environment:** Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia, D-Coachella
- **Equity and Justice:** Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice
- **Workforce Development:** College of the Desert's Solar Energy Training Program
- **Corporate Partner:** Cory White of U.S. Bank

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