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YAC Lends a Hand on GRID Solar Panel Project

Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke teamed up with volunteers from the Youth Advisory Committee and a team of professionals Saturday (May 7) to install solar panels at the residence of a most appreciative single mom.

Burke overcame her fear of heights, strapped on a safety harness and put on a hard hat as she worked on the roof of the Comiskey Court home of Monica Cruz, who will save hundreds of dollars a year by going solar.

"It was a big, big, big hurdle for me to overcome but I'm glad I did it," Burke said. "Bringing solar to deserving Perris residents is a most worthwhile goal and I am happy to play a part in it. This is a win-win situation for everybody. Residents paying less for electricity have more money to spend in Perris, which creates a better economy."

There are additional benefits.

Solar-power systems produce no greenhouse gases, which protects the environment. And many of the installers were women—as were the three members of the YAC—dispelling the notion that they can't work in construction.

"This is terrific," she said. "We are hitting so many targets on this one project."



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke and GRID Alternatives supervisor Ernesto Rochester install a solar panel May 7 at the residence of Monica Cruz, who expects to save thousands of dollars in electricity bills in the coming years.

The non-profit GRID Alternatives completed the solar installation on Cruz's home.

Cruz, who works as a medical assistant, learned about the solar-option from a utility bill earlier this year. Cost of the solar panels is funded through California's cap-and-trade legislation, said Bambi Tran, regional director for GRID Alternatives.

Tran said the non-profit has installed about 40 solar systems for low-income families in Perris in the last three years. Total lifetime savings to Perris residents: an estimated \$1.3 million. Cruz can expect to pocket about \$20,000 in savings.

Tran praised the City of Perris for partnering with GRID to provide alternative, clean electricity to needy residents.

"The City of Perris' pro-active commitment to this program makes a big difference," Tran said. "They are leading by example."



Sara Cortés-dePavon, who works in the City of Perris housing division, stands with Youth Advisory Committee members Yajaira Velazquez, Gabby Bulacan and Vivi Pavon-Cortés and Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke at the solar panel installation project May 7.

Teen volunteers in action

Youth Advisory Committee members Gabby Bulacan, Vivi Pavon-Cortés and Yajaira Velazquez were too young to climb onto the roof, so they supported the solar project from terra firma. They handed panels, tools and other equipment to work crews on the roof. YAC members support several volunteer efforts, including community clean-ups, open-air nights and forums geared for teenagers.

"We want to help the people of Perris get the services they need," said Bulacan, 16, who attends Paloma Valley High School. "Anything I can to help families helps me rest easier at night."

Pavon-Cortés, 17, who attends Temescal Canyon High School, said the solar project allowed the teen volunteers to work with adults to improve the quality of life in Perris.

"It's nice to see we can help out other people in Perris—not just teenagers," she said.

Velazquez, 17, who attends Nuview Bridge Early College High School, said she took part in the solar system installation to "encourage other teenagers to help volunteer in their community."

"It feels good to help deserving families," she said.



Bambi Tran, regional director for GRID Alternatives, chats with Perris Youth Advisory Committee members Yajaira Velazquez, Vivi Pavon-Cortés and Gabby Bulacan during the solar installation project at the home of single mom Monica Cruz.

A grateful resident

Cruz, the mother of two boys and a girl, watched with interest as the panels went into place. She talked with Burke, the teenagers from the YAC and with representatives of GRID. Even with her job, money is tight and she was pleased to benefit from harnessing the power of the sun. The system utilizes 14 panels that will generate about 3.26 kilowatts of electricity.

"I feel blessed to have all this help," Cruz said. "I am grateful to the City of Perris. This will provide my family a very big help."

GRID representatives said they are training workers—including many women—to become part of work crews that install rooftop solar panels. Several of the workers who installed the system at the Cruz residence were women.

That pleased City Councilwoman Burke, an advocate of women working in non-traditional careers like construction.

"This project lets people know that women can work in construction—and I think that's great," Burke said.

Additional information about the solar-panel installation program is available at www.gridalternatives.org.

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