

Applegate solar tour a big hit

BY TOM CARSTENS

Saturday, October 3, was a full day for the Applegate residents and volunteers who helped make this year's solar tour a resounding success. The popular event was a sellout for the second year in a row. Four valley homeowners and one business offered the public a peek at their innovative energy efficient designs.

All of the homes on the tour featured three inexpensive traits: a) they each used ample insulation in tightly constructed exterior walls and ceilings; b) they all took advantage of passive solar gain; and c) each used thermal mass to minimize interior temperature fluctuation. A well-insulated structure provides a complete thermal envelope that minimizes heat loss in winter and generally obviates the need for expensive cooling systems in our hot summers. Maximizing southern exposure permits the sun's rays to penetrate south-oriented glazing to provide light and heat in the winter months. For summer months, this design must also be accompanied by some sort of shading, such as eaves or deciduous trees. The temperature retention characteristics of concrete, rocks, or just plain earth will complement the effects of solar gain and help keep room temperatures steady and power bills low.

All the homes on the tour offer very comfortable and affordable living. One of the tour homes was rewarded with Earth Advantage's highest level for sustainable construction, the Platinum Certification.

Most of the tour stops featured active solar systems as well. The most popular solar system in the Applegate Valley is a solar hot water system. This relatively simple system commonly relies on rooftop panels to collect the sun's rays that heat a fluid and send it to a heat-exchanger that, in turn, heats domestic

water. Since about 25% of our total energy expense goes to heat our water, this is no insignificant contribution. Current rebates and tax incentives make this a very affordable option with a quick payback.

Two of the stops employed grid-tied photovoltaic (PV) systems to complement Pacific Power electricity. PV panels on the roofs convert sunlight to DC power. An inverter converts this power to AC current that can be utilized by the homeowner. Excess power is returned to the electricity grid for retail credit to the homeowner. These systems tend to be less popular because of their expense and relatively low efficiency. Their installation makes good sense, however, in a well-insulated structure. According to Solar Oregon, current incentives offered by the state of Oregon and the federal government can reduce the cost to the customer by up to 70%, and even more for a commercial enterprise.

The tour wasn't all work. The 100 patrons enjoyed a delicious lunch provided by Eve's Cafe. Troon Vineyard hosted a grand finale with live music, wine tasting, and scrumptious hors d'oeuvres.

The tour was sponsored by our own Greater Applegate Community Development Corporation and the Earth Advantage Institute. The American Solar Energy Society provided materials and financial support. Next year, solar tours will be offered in other communities of the Rogue Valley.

For those interested, The Energy Trust of Oregon, Solar Oregon, and the Oregon Dept of Energy are excellent resources for information. If you're thinking of building or remodeling, Earth Advantage can help get you started.

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Above: Bill Dunlap shows off his Platinum Level Earth Advantage home to the Applegate Valley Solar Tour. Photo: Nancy McLain

Below: David Kennedy explains his strawbale home to Applegate Valley Solar Tour patrons. Photo: Tom Carstens



Become a Master Recycler in Spring 2010

Jackson County Recycling Partnership and OSU Extension Service invite residents and business representatives to become Master Recyclers, gaining a broad understanding of waste prevention, recycling, the local solid waste infrastructure, hazardous waste avoidance, and composting. Join a ten-week training course that offers an extensive training manual, discussion-based classes, presentations from local and regional experts and field trips to relevant sites, including the regional landfill, waste-to-energy plant, composting facility and a waste water treatment plant.

Master Recyclers are required to give 40 service hours to support and expand local waste diversion programs and projects. Weekly classes will take place on Tuesday evenings, March 2-May 11, 5:30-8:30 pm at the OSU Extension classroom, 569 Hanley Road. Applications are due Monday, February 1, 2010 and are available online at www.jcmasterrecyclers.org. For more information, contact OSU Extension Service at 541-776-7371.

2009 Plastic Round-up Results

The 2009 Jackson County Plastic Round-up was a big success! Over 18 tons (36,268 lbs) of plastic were diverted from the landfill in two days! That's 617 cubic yards, or 16,659 cubic feet. Folks in over 700 cars and trucks dropped off plastic generated by their homes, neighbors and businesses.

Time to start saving plastic for the 2010 event! Organizers are already planning the next annual Round-up for autumn of next year. For a list of plastic items that are acceptable for recycling, visit www.jcrecycle.org and go to "Special Events."

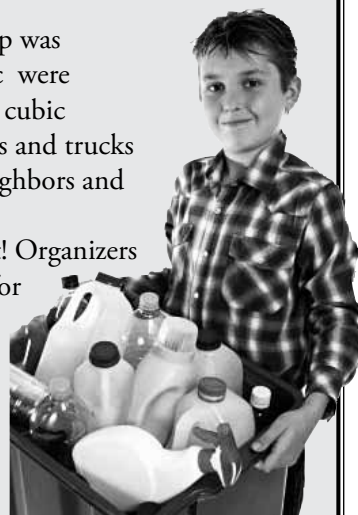
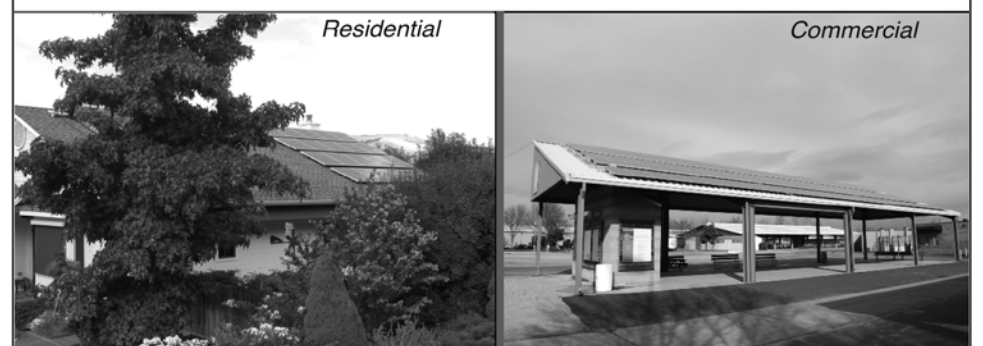


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