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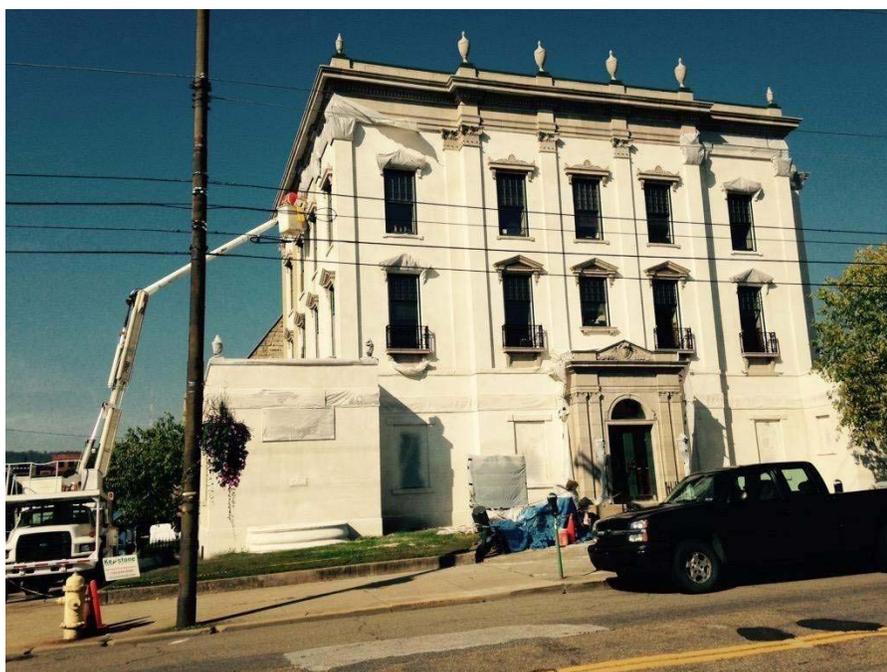


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Saturday, November 14, 2015

Sun power rising across West Virginia

by **Andrew Brown**, Business Reporter



West Virginia Public Broadcasting courtesy photo

The Linsly Institute building in Wheeling, which served as West Virginia's first capitol, had solar panels installed earlier this month. The historic building is one of a number of homes and businesses that have moved to solar energy.



Mary Ellen Cassidy courtesy photo Mary Ellen Cassidy and her husband own the Linsly Institute building. They joined a solar co-op in Wheeling and have had several people ask about the recently completed project. "We have gotten great reactions. People are really amazed and surprised," Cassidy said. "Solar is not a visible entity here in the valley. You don't walk down the street or through neighborhoods and see solar panels."

The number of West Virginia homeowners and businesses installing solar panels is increasing as solar co-ops continue to pop up in various regions of the state.

On Thursday, the newest solar group met in Buckhannon to gauge local residents' interest in collectively purchasing solar panels for homes and businesses in Upshur, Tucker and Randolph counties.

If the organizers get enough people on board — about 20 are needed — the group would make the fourth solar co-op to be formed in recent years.

While West Virginia still has far fewer solar installations than other states, renewable-energy advocates and residents who already have made the leap to solar believe interest in the technology is growing and will only become more prominent as existing co-ops become more successful.

"I have always been interested in renewable energy and solar panels," said Cory Chase, a Tucker County resident who has led the effort to start the new co-op. "Through social media, I have learned about the co-ops in Morgantown, Wheeling and Charleston."

Chase, a massage therapist and former ski instructor, said his main goal in installing solar panels on his property is to reduce the environmental impact of his energy usage.

"For me, it's an environmental end goal," Chase said. "It's a moral and ethical choice for me."

In its simplest form, a solar co-op is a group of people who join together to obtain a better deal on solar panels and installations.



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university in Charles Town, the Morgan County Courthouse, a Department of Environmental Protection office in Charleston and the Hurricane Waste Water Treatment Plant. They also have contracted on projects for beer distributors, funeral homes and 10 houses managed by Habitat for Humanity.

Williams said he doesn't understand why local officials would pass laws and policy that would detract from these types of jobs. He added that he doesn't believe the acceptance of customer-generated solar should be a political sticking point.

"Our right to make our own energy," he said, "is a very conservative and libertarian view."

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