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Sun shines on local app for federal grant

Grant covers 35 percent of big solar panel project

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January 18, 2013

By **Greg Stiles**
Mail Tribune

It took three cracks, but the third one paid off as Les Connell finally received an Oregon Energy Department grant to put solar panels on the Northridge Assisted Living Center roof.

After coming up short against stiff competition from the northern end of the state, Connell and Northridge landed a Renewable Energy Development grant in July, paving the way for a \$195,000 solar project.

NW Photon Energy of Lake Oswego is installing 204 photovoltaic panels produced by Hillsboro's Solar World at the senior housing center just north of Phoenix on South Pacific Highway. The project is expected to be wrapped up next week. "We first applied for a grant three years ago," Connell said. "Our competition came particularly from the north. They were different types of energy grants than this one and went to public projects, schools and those kind of things."

When the so-called RED grants came out this year, Connell put his company's best foot forward. Word that Northridge got the grant came the first week of July. "We had a favorable edge because we get a lot more sun than in Salem and Portland," he said. "We're also an affordable housing center built by state tax-exempt bonds issued by Oregon Housing and Community Service."

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The RED grant covers 35 percent of the project cost, while federal tax credits spread over the next five years will cover another third. "The other third is out of our pocket with an estimated five-year recovery period," Connell said.

Although the project could have been double in size, Connell wanted to keep the cost in the \$200,000 range. "It can still be expanded at any time," he said.

The solar panels will generate up to 50 kilowatts of electricity that will be fed directly into the Pacific Power grid. Connell anticipates Northridge will see an 8 percent to 10 percent reduction in its monthly energy bill that runs between \$3,000 and \$5,000.

Reach reporter Greg Stiles at 541-776-4463 or e-mail business@mailtribune.com.

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