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BUILDING TOGETHER

Going Green

Give Solar Installs \$25,000 In Panels At Our Community Place **By MEGAN WILLIAMS**

Daily News-Record _____ **HARRISONBURG** — Sam Nickels has been the executive director of Our Community Place for nine months now.

Located near downtown Harrisonburg, Our Community Place is a nonprofit that provides a place and services for people who are homeless or dealing with adverse life experiences.

Nickels has been friends and attended the same church as Jeff Heie for years.

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Volunteers install solar panels on the roof of Our Community Place on Thursday afternoon.

Daniel Lin / DN-R



Volunteer Yolo Moonsh-Adow helps install solar panels on the roof of Our Community Place Thursday afternoon.

Daniel Lin / DN-R

Nonprofit Given \$9,000 Grant From Merck Company Foundation

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Recently Heie approached Nickels with an idea for his new nonprofit organization, Give Solar.

Heie wanted Our Community Place to be the next project that Give Solar helped. The organization previously worked with Eastern Mennonite University and Gift and Thrift in Harrisonburg.

As the name suggests, the organization raises money and seeks grants to provide solar energy to other nonprofits that can benefit from the cost savings that solar energy can provide.

After having an engineer come out to confirm that the roof of Our Community Place, 17 E. Johnson St., could support solar panels, the \$25,000 in panels were ordered and installed with the help of volunteers on Thursday.

Called a “solar barn-raising,” the installation of the panels took most of the morning and into the afternoon. Some wiring remains to be done before the panels can start converting the sun’s rays into energy.

Nickels said once the solar panels are operational in a couple of weeks, they will reduce the building’s electric bill by 75 percent, which equates to about \$3,600 a year. That money will then be able to be used for programming for the community.

Fundraising for the project continues. Heie was given a \$9,000 grant from the Merck Company Foundation, and an additional \$9,000 has been raised through crowdfunding and affinity groups that have interest in either solar energy or the mission of Our Community Place.

Nickels is hopeful that the remaining \$7,000 will be raised by the end of the month. Ideally, the project will receive small donations in large quantities, which will help raise awareness about the organization and its mission.

“This is really going to help us save money in the long run,” Nickels said, and the fact that the money for the solar paneling is coming from grants and crowdfunding and not out of pocket is making it doable.

Heie got into solar energy when he was living in Arizona. He was surprised that solar energy wasn’t as widespread there at that time as you’d imagine in a state that has 300- plus days of sunshine.

“As the prices came down, people began realizing it’s a better investment for our planet,” he said. “It’s an elegant solution. The rays of the sun can produce electricity. It’s a beautiful way to do it.”

More information about Give Solar can be found at [https:// give.solar](https://give.solar); to learn more about Our Community Place, go to ourcommunityplace.org.

Contact Megan Williams at 574-6272, @DNR_Learn or mwilliams@dnronline.com



Volunteers Stan Godshall (left) and Tim Cassel install solar panels on the roof of Our Community Place in Harrisonburg.

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