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New Solar Co-op Hopes to Shine in Orange County

Orange County, FL (August 8, 2016) —Orange County homeowners looking to add solar power to their homes have an opportunity to do so at a discount through a new solar co-op program. The initiative is spearheaded by Orange County Government, the League of Women Voters of Florida and Florida Solar United Neighborhoods (FL SUN), which is a local nonprofit working to organize solar co-ops across the state. According to the Florida Public Service Commission, 11,626 utility customers (less than 1 percent) in Florida have rooftop solar installed. In Florida, these co-ops have worked with nearly 340 homes and businesses across the state.

Solar co-ops provide bulk discounts – up to 20 percent – for a group of homeowners who are interested in purchasing solar panels. As part of a solar co-op, citizens benefit from the educational process and each participant signs his or her own contract with the installer, and everyone gets the discount. All homeowners who reside in Orange County are eligible to participate in the co-op.

Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs officially signed up for the co-op and she's hoping other residents will consider joining as well.

"This technology is an excellent long-term investment and we're delighted to invite our residents to participate. The Orange County Solar Co-op is a powerful way to leverage our collective buying power and go solar together," said Mayor Jacobs. "Florida's outlook is bright for solar and Orange County's Co-op can help lead the way."

The solar co-op supports Jacobs' goals in her Sustainability Initiative, "[Our Home for Life](#)," which seeks to reduce barriers to alternative energy and increase renewable energy production by 10 percent in 2020 and 25 percent by 2040.

Joining the co-op does not obligate members to purchase panels. After the co-op receives bids from solar installers in the area, members will select one or two companies to perform the installations at a group discount.

The exact price of a PV (photovoltaic) system is dependent on homeowners' preference in system size and their home's energy consumption. Additionally, there is a federal tax credit of 30 percent towards installation costs. Homeowners have the option to install the size PV system that fits their budget.

"Experts tell us Florida's sunshine gives it the potential to be among the top three states in America for solar power, and by joining in solar co-ops Floridians can start planning for the sun to help pay their electric bills," said Pamela Goodman, president of the League of Women Voters of Florida. The League of Women Voters of Florida has partnered with FL SUN and various markets in Florida, including Orange County and St. Petersburg, to promote solar initiatives.

In addition to promoting the solar co-op to residents, Orange County is encouraging its more than 7,500 employees to consider signing up.

East Orlando resident Jon Weiss, director of Orange County's Community, Environmental and Development Services department, is one employee who already participated in a solar co-op and had solar installed in May of this year.

"The co-op really helped us understand the solar project costs and benefits. I realized the questions I had were the same ones that my neighbors had, and I had confidence in the information provided by the contractor selected by the co-op." said Weiss. "We sized the system to match our budget, and are very pleased with the savings on our power bill. Our up-front investment should be recouped within the next five to six years."

In considering going solar, Weiss suggests that your home's roof be in relatively good condition as the panels can last 20-25 years.

Orange County has a goal to obtain 500 participants in the co-op program with 30 percent of the residents opting to Go SOLAR. The co-op deadline to sign up is December 2016. Orange County is sponsoring Community Power Network and FL SUN, 501(c)(3) non-profits, to provide technical assistance to neighborhood solar co-ops at no charge to participants.

"I am excited to work with Orange County residents to educate them about the benefits of solar energy," said FL SUN Co-op State Director Angela DeMonbreun. "If you've ever thought about going solar before, this is the perfect opportunity to do so. We have established that this model works in Orange County and in other states."

FL SUN expands access to solar by educating Florida residents about the benefits of distributed solar energy, helping them organize group solar installations, and strengthening Florida's solar

policies and its community of solar supporters. Grants from Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Barancik Foundation and Southern Alliance for Clean Energy broadly support FL SUN's work.

As part of the Go SOLAR Florida initiative, Orange County and other partners have worked to streamline the permitting process for solar installations. Now solar permits in the county can be processed in a single day on a walk-through basis. Also, use of one of the standard designs that have been pre-approved by the Florida Solar Energy Center can save additional time and money.

To learn more and register for an information session, visit www.flsun.org/orange-county or email solarteam@flsun.org. Upcoming information sessions are as follows:

- Aug. 22 from 6:30 - 8 p.m. at the Orange County Agricultural Extension Office located at 6021 S. Conway Road in Orlando.
- Aug. 23 from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Meadow Woods Recreation Center located at 1751 Rhode Island Woods Circle in Orlando.
- Aug. 24 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the First Unitarian Church located at 1901 E. Robinson Street in Orlando.

Additional meetings will be scheduled as well, so visit www.flsun.org/orange-county for listings.

About Orange County Government: *Orange County Government strives to serve its citizens and guests with integrity, honesty, fairness and professionalism. Located in Central Florida, Orange County includes 13 municipalities and is home to world-famous theme parks, the nation's second largest convention center, and a thriving life-science research park. Seven elected members make up the Board of County Commissioners including the Mayor who is elected countywide. For more information, please visit www.ocfl.net or go to the Orange County Facebook and Twitter pages.*

About the League of Women Voters: *The Florida League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization with 31 chapters around the state that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, as well as influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has long supported issues relating to clean energy and sustainability, along with voting rights and open and transparent government.*

About the Community Power Network: *The Community Power Network (CPN) is a network of grassroots, local, state and national organizations working to build and promote locally based renewable energy projects and policies. The Florida Solar United Neighborhoods (FL SUN) Program Director will actively work to establish co-ops, including vetting bids and provide technical and legal support.*

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