

SEBASTIAN RIVER AREA Hometown News

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PLANNING A TRIP?

'Touring with the Townies' features reader-submitted photos from travels. Let's see how many places we can go! Send in your picture or questions to newsfp@hometownnewsol.com



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LOCAL DEALS ON THE GO

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Community Calendar

FRIDAY, JUNE 24

• **Animal Photography class**, 9 a.m.-12 p.m., Includes instruction, materials, snack and keepsake, \$30. Humane Society of Vero Beach and IRC, 6230 77th St., Vero Beach. To register: (772) 571-6418.

SATURDAY, JUNE 25 – SUNDAY, JUNE 26

• **Vero Beach Air Show:** Gates open at 9 a.m., flying starts at noon at the Vero Beach Regional Airport, 3400 Cherokee Drive, Vero Beach. Featuring a range of air show performers, along with static displays of aircraft and a family fun zone for children. Vendors will offer souvenirs, food and drinks. General adult admission tickets are \$25 each day; general youth tickets (age 5-12) are \$15 each day. For more information, visit www.veroairshow.com.

SATURDAY, JUNE 25

• **Zumba party:** 2-4 p.m., Humane Society of Vero Beach and Indian River County shelter, 6230 77th Street, Vero Beach. Zumba is a fun form of exercise with working out to Latin beats and popular music. Zumba instructors Jose Ratto and Edwin Rivero are donating
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Learning the basics



Photo courtesy of Karen Espling Photography

Kelly Walker of Vero Beach Equine is showing Michael Kastoriano, 10, how to bridle his horse, Princess, during summer camp, meant to improve participants' riding skills.

Sebastian couple uses solar power to avoid electric bills

By Mike Winikoff

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A Sebastian couple has a message for those who fret about high electricity bills: install a solar system and you can reduce your monthly bill to nearly zero.

Touring the home that Joanne Nesbitt and Glenn Krag share, the first impression is that they haven't needed to cut back at all on energy-using appliances. The new, large home has everything you'd expect in any other modern home, including air conditioning, televisions

and computers, all solar-powered.

Ms. Nesbitt and Mr. Krag were generous and accommodating in showing off their four bedroom home that draws all its needed electricity from solar panels on the roof. The house does have a gas stove, pool heater, and clothes dryer, but everything else is electric.

Glenn Krag is a retired professor of natural resources and economic development from the University of Minnesota. Joanne Nesbitt was an IBM accountant who currently teaches business courses online. Both had an interest in environ-

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Elected officials, scientists fight for manatees

By Mike Winikoff

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In January, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) proposed downlisting West Indian manatees, the type of manatees that appear on the Treasure Coast, from endangered to threatened. This change in status would greatly reduce protections for the manatees.

The FWS requested public and scientific input on the proposal, and the response was overwhelmingly opposed. The FWS received nearly 87,000 comments and petition signatures against the downlisting, and only 72 comments in support.

"The Service asked to hear from the public and from the scientific community, and the message they received in return was that the agency should abandon this misguided proposal and get to work on the critical projects that must be implemented before a legitimate downlisting can be considered," said Dr. Katie Tripp, Save The Manatee Club's Director of Science and Conservation.

Florida Senator Bill Nelson sent a letter to FWS that read in part: "I write in strong opposition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's proposal to downgrade the West Indian manatee from an endangered species to a threatened one. I do not believe there is sufficient scientific support for a reclassification at this time."

"Manatees have been listed as endangered since 1967 due to threats from pollu-

See MANATEES, page 4

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Solar

From page 1

mental protection when they met, but a trip they took together led them to conclude solar was the way to go.

"We went on a trip to Antarctica two years ago," said Ms. Nesbitt. "When we went down there it opened our eyes to what we're doing to our earth and passing on to our children and grandchildren. When we returned from that trip and decided to build this home, that experience pushed us to make it solar."

"We've travelled throughout the world and seen other countries using so much more wind and solar power," said Ms. Nesbitt. "Here, in a big nation like this, why wouldn't we use the sun, in Florida? What are we doing?"

Together they decided solar was the right thing for them, and when they looked into it they found Lifestyle Builders were very advanced in this field. The builders were offering solar throughout the community and were very experienced.

"They have this down to a science and do a really good job with solar," said Ms. Nesbitt. "Everything in the home is energy efficient."

"All of the solar houses get tested for efficiency with a HERS (High Efficiency Rating System) rating," said Ms. Nesbitt. "Ours is a negative 8 – the lowest they ever recorded."

The home has 29 solar panels on the roof, all facing in one direction, not visible from the road.

"We're so happy with this," said Mr. Kreg. "Our electric bills for five months now have been zero. The only thing we have to pay is a franchise fee of \$9.43."

Their initial investment in the solar system including the panels was about \$27,000. Being a former IBM accountant, Joanne crunched the numbers.

"I did a cost-benefit analysis. The federal government gave us 30% of the cost back in the first year. They stopped that program last year. Then we had a few hundred dollar energy credit off the taxes."

I asked if there was any way to capture and store the energy to use on a rainy day.

"You could, in theory, with battery storage as backup, but the law doesn't allow us to do that," said Mr. Kreg.

"FPL is in business to sell energy," said Ms. Nesbitt. "We're making energy."

"We don't actually store any power," said Mr. Kreg. "We're connected to the grid."

We get a credit when we produce excess energy, and when we need more energy they take some of that credit back."

"They discourage you from going off the grid. Our solar panels have to feed directly into the grid, not directly into our house. It's all self-contained, the photo-voltaic cells up there. Each one is like an individual little power plant."

When the non-solar parts of the neighborhood have a power outage, theirs automatically kicks off too. Since they are feeding energy into the grid, it would be a danger for them to keep sending power into the grid when power company workers are working, for example, on downed power lines. So their system automatically switches off when the power goes down in the neighborhood.

"The meter here goes in two different directions," said Ms. Nesbitt. "When we're making electricity, it goes in one direction, and when we're buying it, it goes in the other. It's an incredible feeling of satisfaction to see the meter going in the right direction,

but the bill of \$9.43 is even better!"

"So far these solar panels have done real well," said Mr. Kreg. "If a panel goes bad, it's only one panel that we need to repair or replace."

Maintenance on the system is "virtually nothing," said Mr. Kreg. "If we get a lightning strike or something, we might have to replace some components, but other than that there's no real regular maintenance. Insurance will cover any storm damage to the solar system."

They've calculated that the system is going to pay for itself within five to six years.

"I don't think a lot of people realize how quick the payback is," said Ms. Nesbitt.

"It's a no-brainer," added Mr. Kreg. "But part of the quick payback is because we got that big tax refund from the feds. That helped. If we didn't have that, it would take a few more years for it to pay back. There's no negative unless you don't like the look of the solar panels, which you don't see when you're in the house."

"The tax appraisers aren't entirely sure how to deal with tax appraisals for homes like ours," said Ms. Nesbitt. "According to Florida law, they cannot tax you on the cost of the solar. That cannot be part of the market value of the house. So that's another opportunity to lower your taxes, another little benefit to having solar."

They can follow exactly what the system is doing at any given time by computer.

"On our computers we have a graph that shows us all 29 panels and shows us how much we're producing every day," said Ms. Nesbitt.

"I watch it every day. We rely tremendously on the computer to show us how we're doing. I think the highest we produced was 53 kilowatt hours in one day, which is quite a bit.




Glenn Kreg and Joanne Nesbitt

They keep the air conditioner at 76 and don't have to cut back on electricity at all. They use as much electricity as they ever feel a need to.

"We use the same modern technology that anybody does," said Ms. Nesbitt. "Isn't it amazing, in this day and age when we have so much technology, that something like 29 solar panels can run your home?"

Mr. Kreg added "We can live well without wasting. We think maybe we're doing something for our grandchildren. We are really pleased with the outcome. It makes us feel good. We wanted to do the right thing. We're minimizing our footprint."



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