

SOL WEST

Renewable Energy Fair



Jennifer and the Bear test the completed Voltsrabbit.

On July 24 and 25, over 1,500 renewable energy enthusiasts gathered in John Day, Oregon for the first annual SolWest RE Fair. Did we ever have a good time!

I met and talked with folks from a variety of western states, Canada, and Mexico. Folks came from over 2,000 miles (3,200 km) away just to attend this fair. Perhaps the most amazing journey to SolWest was by The Sol Brothers—Bob Maynard,

Parabolic barbeque.



Gene Hitney, and Larry Elliot—who drove a solar-powered truck over 290 miles (465 km) to reach John Day.

Folks Came from Far and Wide to Where?

John Day is a tiny town in eastern Oregon. With a population of about 1,800, it's hard to even find it on the map. I know most of the SolWest attendees had never been to John Day before. On our drive there, I wondered how this small town would react to having its population nearly doubled by RE maniacs. I need not have worried—the local folks were very hospitable and even attended the fair!

Harnessing youth power.



Primarily a cattle and timber town, John Day is looking to diversify its industries. SolWest was thoroughly supported by the local financial and political infrastructure. These folks are smart. They realize that with over 300 full sun days yearly, John Day is a great site for solar energy and new solar industries.

The Friday night before the SolWest fair, there was a networking dinner for the exhibitors. At this dinner, local folks spoke to the assembled group of over 150 people, who were busy stuffing their faces with a great meal. The local businesspeople and politicians are ready to bring solar energy industries into John Day.

Learning new tricks.





Water pumping has many uses.



RE information exchange under the Eastern OR sun.

They have the energy, the work force, and the spark to do it, too.

John Day is located in the middle of Oregon's high mountain desert country. The scenery is spectacular and varied—everything from big mountains to rivers and forests. And while John Day may appear to be in the middle of nowhere Oregon, it's really about the same distance from a number of large metro areas. Folks traveling from Boise, Reno, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Spokane, and Missoula can all reach John Day in a day's drive.

What a Fair!

SolWest was held on the Grant County Fairgrounds, which is well suited to an event of this size. There was plenty of room for over fifty booths displaying all kinds of RE technology, and the twenty-nine

workshops during the weekend. There was ample space for folks camping out or spending the weekend in their RVs.

The booths ran the gamut from very official and corporate to down-home funky. At SolWest, Idaho Power rubbed shoulders with Mom & Pop Solar, and there wasn't a single fist fight. One RE company—I can't say who—even hooked up a couple of PVs to a Micro Sine inverter and created an instant guerrilla system. They plugged it into the grid right under the eyes of the local utilities, and everyone smiled. Now that's what I call an energy fair activity!

Not all booths were directly concerned with energy. Some focused on building, conservation, gardening, and of course, food. I tasted some of the best BBQ ever at one of those booths.

The folks attending SolWest had an interesting and diverse mixture of ages and backgrounds. They all had one thing in common—an intense interest in renewable energy. Many of the folks already had systems up and running or were planning on installing an RE system soon. The *Home Power* booth was jammed with folks asking technical questions. We always create a mini living room at our booth so folks can sit and talk. At SolWest, this area was filled with people sharing information about what was working and what wasn't.

Workshops

There were twenty-nine workshops held over the weekend on all phases of RE and sustainable living. If you weren't at SolWest, you missed hearing a long list of RE pioneers presenting the information that they know best. The workshop

Old stuff: Low tech wind power.



New stuff: High tech hot water.





Jennifer Barker did it!



Another Guerrilla Solar happening.



Mike and Shari convert it on the spot.

presenters included Michael Hackleman, Kelly Larson, Steve Willey, Doug Boleyn, Bob-O Schultze, Don Harris, Frank Vignola, Mike Oehler, Candice Gossen, Dale Costich, and many others.

Mike Brown and Shari Prange had the very best workshop—they converted a VW Rabbit into an electric Voltsrabbit over the weekend and had it driving around the fairgrounds by Sunday afternoon! See Shari's report on the conversion in this issue.

It wasn't just information that circulated during this fair. I watched

many folks hauling PV modules, solar cookers, inverters, instruments, and wind generators out to their cars. Many of the vendors with "Fair Specials" went home with empty trucks and fat wallets. If there is anything better than having your questions answered by the experts, it has to be taking home boxes of PV modules at great prices!

Jennifer Barker

Energy fairs such as SolWest don't just happen. Generally, one or two core organizers are the driving force. The sparkplug for SolWest was Jennifer Barker. Jennifer began her work well over a year ago. She

began with a firm foundation by creating the nonprofit organization, The Eastern Oregon Renewable Energy Association (EORenew), to sponsor the fair. She worked tirelessly and meticulously to ensure that every detail of this fair was the best it could be. It showed. If anyone wants to know how to do this job right, call Jennifer.

Next Year?

We have big plans for next year's SolWest. The SolWest folks and *Home Power* are teaming up to present a pre-fair workshop, where we will design and install a working PV system. This system will be

The Sol Brothers got there on pure photons.



Active, passive, and photovoltaic—SolWest had it all.





Dealers did what dealers do.

permanently intertied to the local grid on the Grant County Fairgrounds. I will be teaching the classroom sessions and Joe Schwartz will be teaching the wrenching sessions. If you want to attend this workshop, or if you want to see your company's RE gear become part of this workshop and on permanent display at the Grant County Fairgrounds, contact Jennifer Barker.

Homeward into the Setting Sun

It was a wonderful weekend. If you weren't there, then you don't know what you missed. The whole *Home Power* crew arrived back home pooped. We had too much fun. We talked shop with way too many folks. We can't wait to do it again.

Access

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Solar gets around!

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