



Green Notes: First UMC Delivers \$16,352 Check to SBS Solar

Early Monday, a crew from SBS Solar was gingerly lifting pallets of solar panels onto the roof of Zootown Arts Community Center – just down Main Street from First Church. Since placing 66 panels atop First UMC’s Education Annex in mid-August, SBS has completed several other installations around town. This week, Missoula’s nonprofit arts center was the happy recipient of clean, renewable electricity from the sun.

Just as ZACC’s installation began, First UMC’s Green Team delivered a check to SBS for the remaining \$16,352 we owed for our project. (Earlier this year, we paid a \$2,000 down payment on the installation to secure our place on SBS’ summer work schedule.)

Ralph Walters, the solar contractor’s general manager, was generous with his compliments for First Church’s congregation. He said SBS Solar does about three projects each year with groups that apply for grant funding from NorthWestern Energy’s E+ Renewable Energy program. Never has a

church or nonprofit organization brought its project to completion as quickly and efficiently as did First UMC, Walters said. “You all should be very proud of what you’ve accomplished.”

Yes, indeed!

It’s only been eight months since First Church’s Green Team proposed that our church pursue a NorthWestern Energy grant, with a 30 percent match from our own members. The numbers were eye-popping, and the time was short. NorthWestern’s deadline to apply for summer 2022 grants was May 1. We needed enough pledges to fulfill our match before that date, as well as engineering work, an assessment of the Education Annex roof’s stability, and a detailed education and outreach plan. The months passed quickly. Along the way, the Green Team also applied for and received a \$1,000 grant from the Methodist Church’s Mountain Sky Conference. Thanks to the enthusiasm and generosity of our congregation, we met every deadline.

In early August, NorthWestern Energy announced that our application was successful and we would receive the \$46,323 grant needed to make our solar power proposal a reality. That meant it was “go time” for our congregation to make good on their pledges. Every person did so in less than three weeks. What an amazing accomplishment! Now we have 66 solar panels atop the building, and only await electrical connections, a city inspection and NorthWestern’s net meter installation. We’re so close!

In the meantime, let’s celebrate this week’s check delivery and the fulfillment of our congregation’s commitment. Every member of First UMC should take Ralph Walters’ words to heart. We can do hard things, and do them well. By the end of September, we should be generating our own electricity – something we couldn’t imagine at the start of this year and hadn’t even thought of doing this time last year.