



Finding a future - and a calling - in solar electricity

By Barbara Grady

STAFFWRITER

Article Created: 04/11/2008 11:58:38 AM PDT

Mark Hilsabeck climbs a ladder to the roof of a home in Berkeley more than a dozen times in a morning, sometimes carrying solar panels weighing 30 pounds each, other times tools and electrical equipment.

When on the rooftop, he and two colleagues lay the panels in even rows facing south. While one secures the panels to the roof, Hilsabeck connects electric wiring to each photovoltaic panel and routes the bundle of wires through a metal conduit that carries the electric circuitry to the home's main electric switch. But first, he stops to check the flow of watts from each panel to the circuit load, adjusting a control box so no one panel is overtaxed.

"It's not repetitive work," says

Hilsabeck, 28, of El Sobrante, a solar panel installer for SolarCity Inc. based in Foster City.

He and a team of two others are installing 15 solar photovoltaic panels on the roof of a back office of the home. Those panels should supply all the electricity needed for both the main house and the office.

"I can definitely see myself doing this for a long time. There's lot's of growth in the solar industry," Hilsabeck said. "And you're doing some good for the world."

Installing solar panels is one of the jobs foreseen in the curriculum of Oakland's Green Jobs Corps _ and one of the jobs in huge demand in the growing green economy. SolarCity has joined the Green Jobs Corps' Green Employer Council to help develop job training curricula and provide apprenticeships to people going through the program. The business expects to hire some of the new workers.

SolarCity Chief Executive Lyndon Rive said the company joined the Green Employer Council because it believes in the mission of bringing the fruits of the green economy to everyone. But the company also joined because it needs workers.

"We are planning on adding 200 workers in the next two years," Rive said. His company has been growing rapidly since its founding in July 2006. It has already hired 210 people.

"Our growth is almost directly proportional to our head count," Rive said, because solar installation is labor intensive.

"These are mostly green-collar workers, people good with their hands, good at building things," he continued. "Many have had electrical experience or plumbing or roofing. We want people who enjoy working in this field, who feel passionate about it."

Borrego Solar Systems Inc., a competitor of SolarCity in the Bay Area, is also hiring people at a clip not seen in other industries. President Mike Hall said he hired 50 people last year, bringing his staff to 120, and expects to hire another 100 people this year.

Contact Barbara Grady at
bgrady@bayareanewsgroup.com or 510-208-6427.


Advertisement



(800) 755-7323

Subscribe today!

www.insidebayarea.com/services



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics



Mark Hilsabeck, an employee of SolarCity Inc., connects electric circuitry to the solar panels he just installed on a Berkeley rooftop. Hilsabeck said he enjoys the work and the fact that it's "doing some good for the world." The solar photovoltaic panels will supply all the electricity needs of a home and its garage. (Barbara Grady, STAFF)



Stuart Diehl, foreman for Borrego Solar, installs solar panels on a home in the Oakland hills on Thursday, Jan. 31, 2008, in Oakland, Calif. The company recently joined the Oakland Green Business Council, and aims to employ local youth trained through the Green Jobs Corps. (Barbara Grady, STAFF)