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Greening the Future of New Orleans

Residents in the Lower 9th Ward rebuild using donated solar systems from Sharp Solar.

by [Stephen Lacey, Staff Writer](#)

New Orleans, Louisiana [RenewableEnergyAccess.com]

Bruce Harris has a big smile on his face. Standing between his small FEMA trailer and peeling yellow house in the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans, he points to a new inverter attached to the worn clapboard.

"I'm about to move into high-tech and do solar. I got the whole system! Look right here!" he exclaims.

Harris' new 1.5-kilowatt (kW) system is one of ten donated to New Orleans residents by the Sharp Solar Energy Solutions Group (SESG) as part of the company's customer conference, called "SOLA in NOLA."

"In the summer, the sun travels just along this edge," Harris says, pointing to the side of the roof where the solar panels are mounted. "I'm excited to be harnessing some of that sun energy."

He watches the four-person team from Namaste Solar climb off his house and pack up their equipment. The day is over and the Namaste team has just finished another successful installation. Eyeing the mounted panels, Namaste President Blake Jones looks pleased with their work.

"It's great being a part of the reconstruction effort here -- to be installing a solar system for someone who's going to make great use of it," Jones says.



Namaste Solar is one of eleven installation companies that have donated their time and labor to put solar systems on the houses of residents in the Lower 9th Ward who are rebuilding their lives after the flooding from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The other companies participating in the effort include Borrego Solar, Ameco, Direct Power and Water, Meridian Energy Systems, HelioPower, REgrid Power, Sharp Solar Energy Systems, Solar Design Associates and Jersey Solar. The teams came down for Sharp's annual customer conference two days early to install the systems.

Sharp partnered with the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, the Alliance for Affordable Energy, Williams Architects and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources to select the installation sites. Applicants for the systems were put in a lottery and selected at random.

Lisa Perilloux was one of those applicants. After finding a flyer for the lottery in her mailbox and submitting an application, she was notified a few weeks ago that she would be receiving a system. The news was an extra payoff for two years of hard work, she says.

Sitting on her front porch, gazing thoughtfully at the gray sky, Perilloux tells her story of hardship, perseverance and a little bit of luck.



"This is a blessing for us, getting solar power. For all the hard work I've done -- I've worked harder in the last two years than I have in my entire life -- having something like this coming back, it makes me feel like my karma is good," she says. "And I think my neighbors are jealous."

Behind her, the installation team finishes hooking up her inverter. Next to her stands Ron Kenedi, Vice President of SESG, listening intently.

"Well, Sharp is happy to be a part of the rebuilding effort here. And we want to teach people that this is the way to do it -- to rebuild structurally sound and also put green, clean energy up on these houses," he responds.

Perilloux is getting close to finishing her house. But looking around the Lower 9th Ward, there aren't a lot of others moving back into the neighborhood. The streets are lined with rows of empty houses partially or fully destroyed by the storm. Yards are sparsely littered with relics of a past life -- a soiled couch, a muddy pacifier, some rusty paint buckets.



But amidst the destruction and slow progress are 10 new solar systems bringing some rays of hope back to the community. The homeowners and community leaders trying to put the area back together have gotten most of their help from efforts like "SOLA in NOLA" by private organizations, says Linda Jackson, Volunteer Coordinator for the New Orleans Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Association (NENA).

Inside a large concrete room that acts as the NENA center, Jackson and Sharp's Kenedi look at a map dotted with yellow and green tacks. The tacks represent areas where people are finally moving back in to.

"The government is trying to tell us we can't come back, but I'm telling them we can," says Jackson. "We've had so many people all over the world that are willing to help. Everything you see here has been donated to us," she says, gesturing toward the room with her hand. That includes a new 1.5-kW solar system from Sharp that will be powering the fluorescent lights and computers.

"We're happy to help," says Kenedi. "I know that everybody we talk to and work with here really appreciates it and understands that making clean energy is really important to the future of this area."

"Oh yes. Thanks. We do appreciate it," Jackson replies.

While people in New Orleans and other areas along the Gulf Coast reconstruct their homes and communities, there are many possibilities for building a greener future. Sharp's donation of solar systems is one way to encourage more development of renewables during post-Katrina reconstruction, says Kenedi.

Bruce Harris agrees. Resting his chin in his hand and furrowing his brow, he thinks about the example he might set for others in the community.

"I think solar should almost be mandatory," Harris says. "You know in New Orleans, it gets hot, bro. And once people find out that it's worth it, I think it'll take off. I really do. You know, this is a chance to use nature, not abuse it."

Stay tuned for a special look at this story in next week's Inside Renewable Energy podcast.

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