

Power of today and tomorrow displayed at GreenHome Expo

Green products and services take center stage at showcase of environmental awareness

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SARASOTA - Ian and Daphne Stanley say it's the real thing.

Not the Coca-Cola being sold at the concession stand at the Sarasota-Bradenton International Convention Center on Saturday, but the move into a new mode of thinking about energy, better known as the "green" movement.

The Stanleys, of Sarasota, came to the center near Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport to see what Ian Stanley says happened in his native Britain years ago: the arrival of alternative energy as a way of life.



Robert Rogers shows interlocking solar cells that are used to make solar panels for commercial applications.

"Coming from the U.K., this all happened over there at least 10, 15 years ago," he said. "Power and energy costs over there are far higher than here. So we had to do something green just for the cost. Whereas over here you had the luxury of cheap power for a long, long time. It's only now that the crunch is beginning to be felt and you're having to go into this sort of thing."

The GreenHome Wamalama Green Business Expo 2009 was a wonderland of new technology as well as some old favorites. In addition to companies showing off their solar power technology, there were firms selling environmentally conscious cleaning products, pest control companies and even car dealers.

Sarasota Ford had a hybrid Fusion on display, and it just wouldn't be an environmental event if a local Toyota dealer - in this case Gettel of Sarasota - didn't have a Prius on display, as well as a hybrid Highlander SUV. Hondacars of Bradenton had its newest hybrid, the Insight, for people to check out and sit in as well as a hybrid Civic.

But the most interesting car might have been the 35-year-old vehicle that sat near the Honda display, an orange 1974 Civic that the dealer had acquired from its own general manager, who had bought the car on eBay.

Nancy Stephan of Sun City tried on the Prius for size, and said she was impressed.

She and her husband are looking for a new car to replace one of their vehicles, a 10-year-old Saturn that they originally bought to tow behind their RV. They also have a Lincoln, she said, but when gas prices started to rise they started to put a lot of miles on the Saturn, and it's been showing its age, she said.



A 1974 Honda Civic was part of the Hondacars of Bradenton display at the expo.

Stephan said she hadn't been impressed with the previous Priuses. "I couldn't see paying all that extra money for a hybrid that is only going to give me four or five miles more per gallon," she said. "So I was waiting to see when the new one comes out."

Salesman Chris Crews explained the instrument panel to Stephan and adjusted the seat for her while she tried out the driving position.

"I think it's a nice car," she said after she got out, and said there was another pleasant surprise: "I expected the price to be higher."

Craig Bailey, the vice president of OneLightBulb.org, said the event was to raise money for the nonprofit organization that seeks to teach people how to be environmentally aware; in other words, green.

The organization encourages people to take the first step by buying a light bulb and installing it, and seeing how things can be different.

"It's one of those things you can procrastinate about, but until you go out and buy your first compact fluorescent bulb and put it in your house, you don't start becoming green," Bailey said. "That's what we recommend as the first step. Go out, get a couple of compact fluorescents, you're going to save 75 percent on your energy use, you've going to help the environment, you're going to cut down on emissions into the air, and you will start becoming a green person."

True, compact fluorescent bulbs costs three times what a regular bulb does, but they last 10 times longer and save 75 percent on energy. They are just expensive to buy originally, he said.

In the long run, everything is less expensive, Bailey said, but it isn't just about buying new stuff. "Being a green person is an attitude. There's a few things you can do, like eating local fruits and vegetables. It's a green thing."



Gettel Toyota salesman Chris Crews, left, explains the controls of a 2010 Prius to Nancy Stephan, who said she is in the market for a new car and is considering a hybrid.

In addition to replace light bulbs, he said, you can set the thermostat higher and fix a leaky faucet.

"A leaky faucet can actually use as much as 10,000 gallons a year and that's all wasted stuff," he said. "It's a mental attitude, being green and ecofriendly."

"It's totally designed to save the earth in the future."

For four students from Bradenton Prep Academy, the event was about raising awareness - and money for their school. Nick Fabre, 14, showed items they were selling in three categories: biodegradable water bottles, electrical products and light bulbs.

One device he showed can be used to see how much you're spending for power on each of your appliances, and another could turn off a whole bunch of electronic devices with one button.

He and Anna Hedgcock, 14; Maureen Mida, 13; and Ariana Czaia, 14, waited eagerly for people to come to their booth.

"If everyone starts using these products, our earth can end up more green and healthier," Ariana said.

Amanda De Santis, of Manatee County recycling, was giving out miniature recycling bins with little seed packets inside. After the packets were removed and the seeds planted, the little bin could be used as a bank to save coins.



James Horner, left, gets information about recycling from Amanda De Santis at Manatee County's recycling booth.

Manatee has the second-highest recycling rate in Florida, she said, behind Palm Beach County, with 42 percent participation. It's not higher because some condo and apartment complexes are not participating because it's not convenient for them.

"Our job is to make it as convenient as possible and make people more aware of being environmentally friendly," she said, then turned to talk with James Horner, who lives in a condo in Bradenton and wants to get recycling started there.

Horner was also checking into solar panels for his unit, explaining that while associations are adept at banning things, a new law says they can't ban solar panels. He wants them on the roof of his unit, he said, and would use the power for the water heater or air conditioner.

"With all the sun we have, we should be using it," he said.

In the solar arena, Robert Rogers of Sunbelt Solar Energy said commercial applications are getting some attention because while the systems are costly, state rebates and federal tax credits can cover part of the cost.

An application he showed could generate 150 kilowatt-hours a day, he said, enough to power a good-sized building and help a company save about \$500 a month on its power bills. The system would cost about \$190,000 because of the cost of the solar cells and the inverter, which converts DC power to AC.



Anna Hedgcock, 14; from left, Nick Fabre, 14; Maureen Mida, 13; and Ariana Czaia, 14, students at Bradenton Prep Academy, sold environmental products at their booth.

It's more affordable, he said, with the government help. "As long as they can get the state of Florida rebate, which is up to \$100,000 on a commercial installation, and then there's the 30 percent federal tax credit," he said.

The company also offers home systems, though their capabilities are more limited and the state rebate is less. The system is engineered to meet local wind codes, Rogers said, and cost about \$42,000, less the 30 percent federal tax credit and the state rebate, which for home installations is \$20,000.

The installation could meet most of your power needs, but it has to be tied into the electrical grid or it won't work. "If the grid goes down, your power is out," he said.

True, battery backups are available, but batteries drive the price up and also require regular maintenance. These other systems require no user intervention beyond a twice a

year washing of the solar cells because they accumulate pollen, especially if they're near trees.

Bruce Fehr of Sarasota, the area representative for Solar Source, showed pictures of installations in his booth. He said Solar Source is one of the biggest solar companies in this part of Florida, doing installations from North Port to north of Tampa, though their biggest job right now is a panel project at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando.

He said it would generate a megawatt of power, about a fifth of what the center needs, per day.

Fehr said he's seeing lots of people interested in photovoltaics. "Really, the best bet in your house for watts saved is solar hot water heaters," he said. You'd save about \$40 to \$50 a month and the initial investment is about \$25,000, minus a Florida rebate and a 30 percent U.S. tax credit.

The trouble, he said, is that most people can't see spending such an amount to save so little right now. Still, he's convinced that this time solar power is here to stay.

"It's always been a practical application. There's no more economical way to heat your pool," Fehr said. But, he noted, "The incentives are just not there right now. The state regulatory system, the way they have the law set up, does not encourage the use of photovoltaics in a residential situation. Commercial? Yes. There, there's more incentives."

But right now, it's not practical for the individual homeowner.

"There's a lot of interest, but when people see the cost" they resist. Fehr noted that the cost issue could be overcome. "In Gainesville, they have a feed-in tariff where the power company pays you more to produce a watt of electricity."

A simple little act when people walk their dogs could also help the environment, said Yvette Little of Simply Green Solutions LLC. With the population of pooches in the state, all of them eating and then doing No. 2, leaving it out to get washed into the stormwater system is bad for everyone, she said.

"We're trying to get the word out so people pick up after their dogs," she said.

On the larger environmental issues, Little said people are starting to become more aware. "More and more, people are realizing that we are having air pollution and water quality problems," she said. "I think people realize that we need to decrease our dependence on foreign oil, and we need to take care of our resources, take care of our environment."

A recent [article](#) in The Atlantic magazine took a look at the new approach to alternative energy, powered by young entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley who are full of ideas about

how to do clean technology better and to go beyond the "sacrifice and asceticism" that scared many people during the energy crises of the 1970s.

"Talking about conservation and energy efficiency in the context of the 1970s summons up images of monkish self-denial, a lifestyle of bulky sweaters and humiliatingly small foreign cars that's a lousy advertisement for the world of tomorrow," the article explained.

There are still threats from the old-line energy providers, Ian and Daphne Stanley said, but these youngsters aren't afraid to innovate.

"It's a more creative younger generation than those who were in power in the '70s, not only political power, but commercial power," Daphne Stanley said. "They were still very much into that Industrial Revolution era, bigger is better, that model. There wasn't creative thinking about how to deal with that new challenge."

The new generation wants to make things better and different, she added.

"They so want to do it," Daphne Stanley said. "Just imagine 30 years from now, if we're all still alive, what fun it's going to be to see what they've done. They're just so creative.

"They're not of the school that said, 'You've got to be more efficient for the sake of efficiency.' It's a totally different mindset."

Now it's to have a better life, and it's not necessarily bigger.

"They've seen the 'bigger-ness' of their parents and the older generation, and they're like, 'What did that do for anybody?' " "It's the only way to go, really," Ian Stanley said. "It's great that the U.S. is finally jumping on board. I feel that in a few years time the U.S. will be the leader in all this."

Daphne Stanley said she had read somewhere that of the top 30 solar and wind category companies, less than 10 percent were American companies, but that could change.

"The advantage there is, the U.S. can stand on the shoulders of Europe and its hard work of the past 20 years, just take it and run with it," Ian Stanley said.

And with President Barack Obama in office, the Stanleys said they believe the U.S. has a leader who's ready to lead on the issue of the environment and alternative energy.

Bailey, the representative of OneLightBulb.org, said he hoped more people will become aware of what they can do and will come to next year's event. "We need to be part of the solution instead of being part of the problem," he said.

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