

BUS-R Solar energy center opens

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Sentinel staff writer

APTOS — The Rising Sun Energy Center has found a home in what else but a solar-powered building.

The 2-year-old non-profit group devoted to promoting energy supplied by the sun, wind and water will operate from a small Cabrillo College building built by students years ago, said Michael Arenson, executive director.

Approximately 300 people celebrated its grand opening under blazing sunny skies Saturday.

"I love solar energy," declared Arenson.

Rising Sun is leasing the small building and is not affiliated with Cabrillo, according to Arenson, who taught solar technology at the school for three years in the 1980s.

Those attending the opening ate pizza baked by the sun, raced solar cars and and toured solar exhibits.

"I'm interested in alternative energy," said Marcos Ramirez of Watsonville, who added that he was looking for ways to reduce his electric bill.

Wearing straw hat, Arenson walked from display to display, demonstrating

the power of solar energy.

He pushed a 4-foot-diameter parabolic dish to face the sun. All the mirrors on the surface of the dish reflect the sun to a point above the center.

People can cook or boil water with the dish.

"It can reach 300 to 400 degrees Fahrenheit," Arenson said.

Next, he showed off the solar-heated water tank. With a turn of the faucet, steaming water poured out. He put his hand under the water before quickly pulling it away.

"Feel how hot it is," he insisted.

Arenson estimated that about 100 homes in Santa Cruz County are solar independent or "off the grid," meaning they are not hooked up to Pacific Gas and Electric Co., which is corporate sponsor of the center.

In the 1970s, there was a lot of talk about solar education, but that didn't seem to sink in with people, he said.

Then in the 1980s, there was no federal funding to promote education, according to Arenson.

Attention waned, he said, but has picked up again since the big 20th anniversary of Earth Day in 1990.

Arenson wants to make solar energy even more prevalent.

Coal, oil and gas all have serious consequences on the environment, he said.

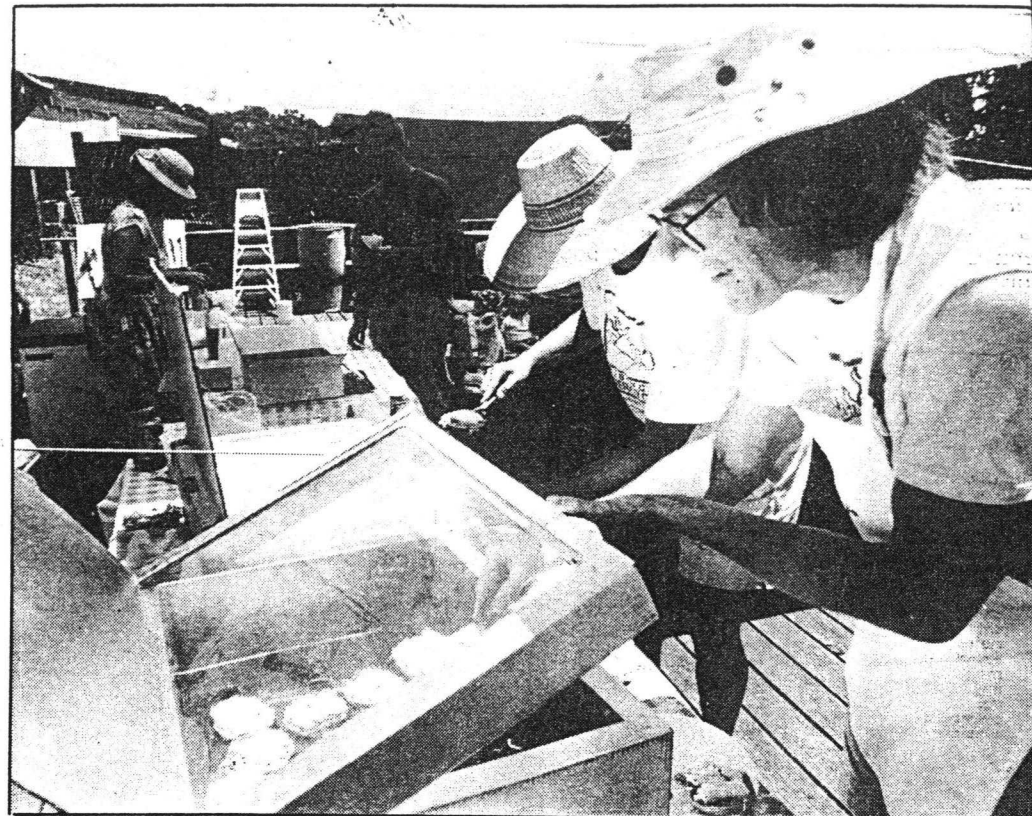
Rising Sun has received two educational grants, both from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The center wants to raise \$25,000, with another \$25,000 coming in from matching federal funds.

With the grants, Rising Sun introduced solar power into four schools in the Santa Cruz City Schools District. The center also recruited students from San Lorenzo Valley Junior High School to build a display to demonstrate energy-efficient lighting.

In addition, workshops on alternative energy are offered. The center will have a workshop on solar electricity in July and one on electric cars in October.

Located near the Cabrillo College Police Department, the center also has a library featuring between 300 and 400 books.

The Rising Sun Energy Center is open Wednesday-Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. It is also open between 4 to 7 p.m. on Thursdays. For more information, call 423-8749.



Bob Stayton, right, and Michael Arenson serve up solar pizzas.

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