

# Santa Cruz tops list of state's solar cities

Watsonville, Aptos also make environmental group's rankings

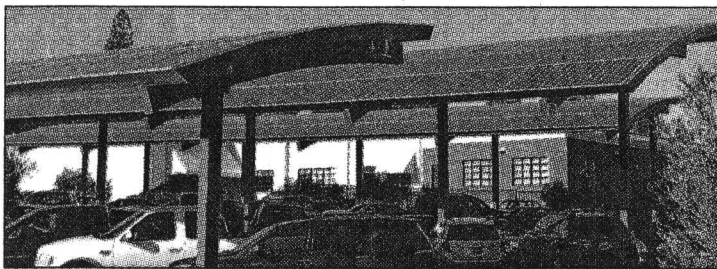
By JASON HOPPIN

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Santa Cruz is full of sun worshippers, and that's especially true when it comes to solar energy.

Often shrouded in fog but a longtime devotee of renewable energy, the city ranks No. 1 in the state — better than progressive Berkeley, better than sunny San Diego — when it comes to the percentage of residents installing solar projects, according to a leading environmental group.

Other local towns aren't far



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

The Plantronics solar display helps give the city of Santa Cruz the designation of having the most solar projects per capita in California.

behind. Watsonville ranks fifth in the state, according to a report by Environment California, while Aptos sits 20th among small towns.

"I think the city has a lot to celebrate," said Michelle Kinman,

clean energy advocate for Environment California. "Santa Cruz has really set the bar for other larger cities to follow in the future."

The dominant solar power in California is San Diego, which leads the state both in the sheer

number of solar projects, at more than 4,500, and in solar capacity, generating nearly 37 megawatts of electricity a year, enough to rank it 25th among all nations.

But if San Diegans built solar projects at the same rate Santa Cruzans do, they would have produced more than four times as many solar projects. The group based its study on figures provided by California utility companies.

Mike Arenson of Santa Cruz-based Arenson Solar Inc., who goes by "Solar Mike," said Santa Cruz had a core group of '70s-era early solar adopters who kept up with it through the 1980s and 1990s, when solar energy largely

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disappeared from the public consciousness.

"We kept solar up in people's minds," Arenson said, adding the industry here has continued to grow in recent years despite the economy. "Santa Cruz was clearly a leader in the early days."

In the Bay Area, numerous cities made the lists of high-ranking solar cities, with Sebastapol — where there is one solar project for every 10 residents — showing particular solar pluck. Santa Cruz, which made the list for cities with populations greater than 50,000, has 1.44 projects for every 100 residents.

Because of their sheer size, San Jose and San Francisco also stand out. San Jose ranks third in the state with more than 2,700 solar installations, generating 31 megawatts of power.

Locally, large companies such as Plantronics have even gone solar. At the company's building near Harvey West Park, solar is a key way the company secures 80 percent of its power from renewable sources.

"It's one of the things the company's always believed in," Plantronics spokes-

## AT A GLANCE

### TOP 10 SOLAR CITIES IN STATE

City	Installations/100 people
1. Santa Cruz	1.44
2. Clovis	1.18
3. Rocklin	1.09
4. Davis	1.09
5. Watsonville	1.09
6. Roseville	0.98
7. Santa Rosa	0.87
8. San Ramon	0.85
9. Santa Barbara	0.81
10. Berkeley	0.76

SOURCE: Environment California

man Russell Castronovo said. "For us, it's a physical reflection of the beliefs of the company."

The state recently surpassed 1 gigawatt of solar energy production, more than all but five nations: Germany, Spain, Japan, Italy and the Czech Republic. Last year, Environment California released a separate study finding that the state was on pace to meet its "One Million Solar Roofs" objective by 2018.

Santa Cruz, like other local governments, has worked to foster solar power,

passing a solar ordinance that ensures sun access for new buildings. The county also hosted a solar home tour last year, and Cabrillo College offers solar-related courses as part of its Construction and Energy Management program.

Arenson also said the first solar system in the state that was tied to the electrical grid was in Bonny Doon, and a state program that encourages residential solar installations, known as net metering, has its origins in Santa Cruz.

In addition, recent state and federal subsidies have reduced the sticker shock of solar projects, making them more attractive to everyday homeowners.

Kinman said the new study shows how much things have changed in two years, the last time Environment California did a report. While the prior report showed solar projects concentrated in affluent coastal cities, the new report shows solar moving inland, to cities such as Rocklin (No. 3 on the list of cities) and Davis (No. 4).

She also said one reason smaller cities such as Santa Cruz best much larger ones when it comes to per capita solar installations is that big cities have high numbers of renters. Those landlords may not be motivated to install solar if tenants are paying the bills.