

SIEA EXPANDS ENERGY SERVICES

BY REG RUDOLPH GENERAL MANAGER

Recently, the San Isabel Electric Association Board of Directors made the decision to expand our energy services department to provide more products and services to members and non-members, including solar power generation systems. Too many people struggle to pay their electric bill, cannot afford to make energy efficient upgrades or can't find someone to install a product. The board of directors feels everyone should have an opportunity to be more energy efficient and save money.

San Isabel Electric's mission is to provide our membership with electric power and other needed products and services that will improve their quality of life. Our reputation of delivering safe, reliable and affordable electricity is well-known and respected.

For the past several decades, our energy services department has also been providing products and services like water heaters, energy audits and electric thermal storage units. Your cooperative has been true to its mission — we do what we say we're going to do.

Empower is the new name of our energy services offering. Empower will still provide electric thermal storage units, water heaters and whole house fans, as well as many new products like insulation, windows and even solar. We're also able to offer financing so your savings can possibly pay for the cost of improvements.

Southern Colorado, because of our rural nature, is often underserved because service providers and vendors don't feel it's profitable enough. San Isabel Electric was formed in 1938 for the same reason: The local investor-owned utility didn't think the rural areas were profitable enough to serve. But a member-owned cooperative doesn't focus on profit. Instead, our principles are based on serving people in need.

I'm extremely excited to make this announcement about Empower. Our existence is based on empowering ourselves to, first, get electricity to southern Colorado and, now, expanding our products and services and providing a way to pay for the investment with the energy cost savings. Cooperatives were formed as self-help organizations, and Empower furthers that cooperative tradition.

History has a way of repeating itself. In 1938, a group of local people came together to bring power to rural southern Colorado because there was a need to improve their lives. Today, San Isabel Electric sees a need to provide energy-saving products and services, and together we'll come together to help improve our members' lives.

To learn more about Empower and how the program can help make power more affordable for you, go to siea.com/empower, call 719-647-6250 or email empower@siea.com.



REG RUDOLPH

5 REASONS TO GO SOLAR WITH

empower
BY SAN ISABEL ELECTRIC



Pre-solar upgrades make solar more affordable.



Work with a local trusted company.



Control costs and save money.



Protect yourself against rising rates.



Generate savings from day one with pre-solar upgrades.



EMPOWERED BY THE SUN

San Isabel Electric members Jacque and Mark Eldred from Pueblo West share their solar story: why they made the change to solar power generation, what they learned along the way and why they chose Empower by San Isabel Electric to go solar and make their power more affordable

BY JACQUE AND MARK ELDRED

We started talking about adding a solar photovoltaic system back in 2007, but decided we weren't quite ready due to the expense. We kept talking about it through the years and, in April 2019, decided it was time.

We knew electric costs generally go up, not down, and, financially speaking, solar could be a good investment, depending on cost. Plus, reducing energy produced with fossil fuels helps the environment and air quality. So, we began to do our homework. Holy cow! There is a lot of information out there. But we took our time to best understand how to fulfill our energy needs.

After several weeks of researching solar panels, solar production, inverters, batteries, solar credits — you get the picture — we started contacting solar installation companies. We spoke with at least five companies and got five different quotes.

Every company used a different panel, brand and size. Quotes were all over the board on number of panels, cost and place of manufacture. There are panels made in

the United States, China, Korea and other countries, and final pricing was just as spread out — about a \$15,000 spread.

In the meantime, logical, mathematically-oriented Mark was trying to figure out our actual energy consumption and what our actual cost is per kilowatt-hour, as well as at what percentage our energy rates had gone up over the last few years, if any.

Every company we spoke to sent out a salesman, basically. Nearly every one of them had a pamphlet or brochure that said electric rates increased on average 4% per year. Each one of them based our rate of return on the solar investment on that 4% figure. One salesman was ready to increase our solar panels to cover 110% of our current energy use, so we could “sell it back” to the power company. Once we found out selling too much excess electricity back isn't cost efficient, we didn't contact that company again.

Enter Jack Snell and San Isabel Electric. Mark decided to call San Isabel and find

out exactly what our historical cost for energy was and is currently. He's a brilliant man. Jack asked if we could come to his office and meet. He wanted to go over something new that SIEA was offering.

We met with Jack — it was now late September or early October. He introduced us to a brand-new program: Empower. SIEA put together a complete package aimed at reducing our energy use, determining solar panel and system



Mark and Jacque Eldred

sizing, and installing and monitoring our system. SIEA would take care of any repairs that may be needed in the future. Wow. One-stop shopping with an electric co-op that's been around for a long time and will continue to be around for a long time.

No more would we have to listen to sale pitches when all we wanted was straightforward, honest answers. We hit the "Jack-pot!"

"We highly recommend and strongly encourage anyone who is thinking about solar energy, or ways to reduce energy consumption and energy bills, to contact San Isabel Electric."

—*Jacque and Mark Eldred*

Jack also showed us a whole house fan on display at San Isabel in Pueblo West. It's a pretty great system that pulls in cool air from outside through open windows to cool the house, then is vented into the attic. Admittedly, this is one of our favorite additions. It has substantially reduced our air-conditioning use and the house smells much fresher.

Jack arranged for Sun Country Energy Solutions to perform our energy audit. We found out our 1994 attic insulation had settled quite a bit, to R11, and we needed more. The company also recommended roof vents over the garage to allow better venting.

Jack and SIEA's Business Development Manager Laura Getts put together a complete Empower proposal: solar panels

and installation, power inverter, whole house fan, insulation, roof vents and, at our request, an electric vehicle charger and generator plug.

The proposal was one of the easiest documents we read since our journey began. We knew the exact cost of each part of our project, total costs including all rebates from SIEA and financing rates.

San Isabel had the best financing rates we had seen to date. And one of the best parts: Our loan payback is included on our bill each month. Doesn't get much easier.

Our entire package was going to cost about the same amount as just getting our solar electric if we had gone with one of the other companies. Talk about value for the dollar!

Once we signed our contract, Jack was able to get everything scheduled. Between October and the last half of December, we received attic insulation, a whole house fan, garage roof vents, a complete and appropriately sized solar power generation system, an EV charger and a generator plug installed and operational. The only thing we had to do was match schedules with the

various contractors.

We absolutely love everything we did. We have averaged 38.5 kilowatt-hours per day since January 1, 2020, and our solar bank has around 2,400 kWh. The additional insulation has reduced our natural gas consumption from 1,200 therms per month to 1,010 therms per month. Oddly enough, for the last two years, the average daily temperature was 41 degrees. We use our whole house fan nearly every night instead of running the air conditioner. Every morning we wake up to a cool, refreshed home. With the addition of the roof vents, our garage no longer feels like a blast furnace.

We highly recommend and strongly encourage anyone who is thinking about solar energy, or ways to reduce energy consumption and energy bills, to contact San Isabel Electric.

Trust us: Make SIEA your first phone call and save a lot of time and frustration.

To learn more about Empower, visit siea.com/empower, call 719-647-6250 or email empower@siea.com.



▲ An interest in adding solar panels (above) led to an energy audit and a more efficient home for the Eldred's in Pueblo West.



MY HOME

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- Windows
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- Electric vehicle charging

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