

# Zelie home becomes focus during solar tour

Jim Smith Eagle Staff Writer

🕒 October 8, 2018 □ Local News □



George Villegas, right, talks to a family from Somerset about his solar powered home in Zelenople on Sunday during the two-day National Solar Tour. The tour, organized by the American Solar Energy Society and Solar United Neighbors, invited interested people to visit sites tapping into solar energy.

**JIM SMITH/BUTLER EAGLE**

ZELIENOPLE — Mother Nature could not have provided more ideal weather for a day to promote solar energy.

While bright sunshine poured down Sunday, a local home became a kind of “open house” for potential buyers — or simply curiosity seekers — of solar panels.

The Villegas family house at 220 S. Jefferson St. in Zelienople was part of an effort across the country to bring attention to the benefits of going solar.

The National Solar Tour, organized by the American Solar Energy Society and Solar United Neighbors, held Saturday and Sunday was a chance for people to learn first hand what living in a solar-powered home is like.

Alan and Brenda Fike, of Somerset, along with their two children, were the first “tourists” to stop at the Villegas home. It was the closest home to theirs on the national tour.

“A day like this,” George Villegas told the Fikes, “we'll be able to produce more (electricity) than what we need (for the day).”

He will earn utility credits, he explained, for any unused power his home's 30 solar panels generate. The panels are mounted on roof trestles.

Dollars and sense wise, Villegas said, his once-monthly electric bill of \$285 will be reduced to between \$10 and \$30.

That brought a smile to Alan Fike's face, and prompted a quiet “wow” from his wife.

Villegas only recently installed a solar power system at his home — the first in the borough. It's so new that he hasn't even gotten his first electric bill yet.

The Fikes, not surprisingly, wanted to know about the cost of switching to solar.

“What kind of investment is there for everything?” Brenda asked.

Villegas said his system cost \$26,000 to \$27,000, which included federal tax credits. The current federal tax credit is 30 percent of the gross system cost.

“I've seen systems for \$12,000 to \$15,000, he told the Fikes, “and other systems up to \$100,000.”

He said there are also state tax incentives available to help ease the initial sting of transitioning to solar power.

He told the Fikes that with the savings in electricity costs, he expects the panels will have paid for themselves in about eight years.

Additionally, Villegas said installing a solar system can be financed and there is no payment due for 18 months.

He explained for the Fikes the workings of the solar energy system. He first pointed to the inverter attached to a wall outside his house.

The inverter serves as the “brains” of the system, he said. It converts direct current (DC) energy generated by the solar panels into alternating current (AC) energy for use in the home.

The inverter is connected to a digital meter that records how much power is being sent from the home to the grid and how much power is being bought from the borough, which operates its own electric utility.

A consultant for a solar power company himself, Villegas, said it took about five days to install the entire system.

The Fikes wondered about any maintenance of the panel.

Nope, according to Villegas. “It's maintenance free.”

He said the panels also come with a 25-year warranty.

On top of all that, he claimed that solar panels increase the value of a home by around \$20,000, give or take.

Asked if he had experienced any down side to going solar, he replied, “I can't think of any.”

At the end of the tour, the Fikes were noncommittal about taking the solar plunge.

“We still haven't decided,” Brenda told Villegas.

That was fine with Villegas. The open house was about opening minds, not making sales.

“The worst thing about solar in Western Pennsylvania,” he said, “is lack of education on solar.”

---

Share this article: [!\[\]\(b64b40baaee5acddc1eab8538ba84754\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(f1009ec4c244bb185d08b1dfae838c51\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(5dddf23aac68a63f73c871e6d51bbca2\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(9e32a1e59584441fda8b2bcdac301b98\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(ce7b7b0c6988d1e28a8442f9daa03d16\_img.jpg\)](#)

---



**Jim Smith**

[@JimSmith\\_BE](#)

Grew up in upstate New York. Earned my Journalism degree in 1983 from the University of Texas at Austin. Worked for two newspapers in Fayette County (Pa.) before starting at the Butler Eagle in 1998.

TODAY'S PHOTOS



[View today's gallery →](#)



### ORDER PHOTO REPRINTS

Our photos are available for purchase online!

**Butler Eagle**

MOST READ STORIES

[One injured in motorcycle-versus-truck crash](#)

 10/07/18  0 Comments

[Lawyer: Parents want 'justice for their son'](#)

 10/06/18  0 Comments

[Police put out warrant for Butler man](#)

 10/05/18  0 Comments

[Late night fire burns down industrial plant](#)

 10/05/18  0 Comments

[Police: heroin buyer turns into head-banger](#)

 10/03/18  0 Comments

MORE LOCAL NEWS HEADLINES



Driver hurt when cycle hits pickup

Local News 0 comments

Hanratty, Bleier turn out for Kelly

Local News 0 comments

Applefest activity

Local News 0 comments

In Mars, orange is new pink

Local News 0 comments

Symphony struts stuff in season opener

Local News 0 comments

TOP VIDEOS



St. Barnabas introduces virtual reality

October 4, 2018



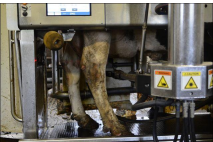
Twirl-A-Thon raising money for women's cancer support group

October 2, 2018



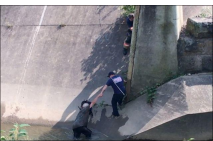
Making a Difference

October 2, 2018



Udder way to go

October 1, 2018



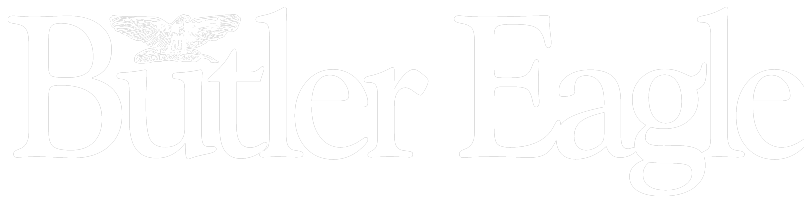
Homeless man rescued from creek

September 22, 2018



Free health clinic marks 10 years

September 21, 2018



Butler County's great daily newspaper

114 West Diamond Street

Butler, PA 16001

(724) 282-8000

☐ [facebook.com/butlereaglenews](https://facebook.com/butlereaglenews)

☐ [twitter.com/butlereagle](https://twitter.com/butlereagle)

#### SUBSCRIBER SERVICES

[Subscribe](#)

[Manage Account](#)

[Contact Circulation](#)

#### SITE MAP

[News](#)

[Sports](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Obituaries](#)

[Editorial](#)

[Community](#)

[Schools](#)

[Classifieds](#)

© 2018 The Butler Eagle

[@ Contact Us](#) ☐ [About Us](#) ☐ [Advertiser Services](#)