

## Green is hot in LCF

**City provides information about grants, rebates for energy and water conservation.**

August 24, 2011 | By Daniel Siegal, [daniel.siegal@latimes.com](mailto:daniel.siegal@latimes.com)



Sign lets customers know about the solar panels used at Foothill Car Wash and Detail Center at 2355 Foothill Blvd. in La Canada Flintridge on Thursday, June 9, 2011. (Raul Roa/Staff Photographer)

La Cañada Flintridge is one of the greenest cities in the region — and not only because of all the trees lining its streets. The city has three times as many residential solar installations as Pasadena or La Crescenta, and more participating businesses in a regional battery recycling program than any other city.

According to the state's GoSolar.org website, which tracks solar installations through its California Solar Initiative rebate program, La Cañada Flintridge is home to 116 residential solar installations, versus 38 in Pasadena and 34 in La Crescenta. There are also three commercial solar installations within the city limits, including La Cañada Eye Care on Foothill Boulevard.

Marty Schaeffer, sales and marketing manager at Phat Energy, a solar installation company based in La Crescenta, said that the company has installed more solar systems in La Cañada Flintridge than he could count. Phat Energy is the most-used solar contractor in La Cañada Flintridge, according to GoSolar, but companies like Akeena Solar, of Campbell, and SolarCity, of San Mateo, both in California, also have installed several solar applications in the city.

"The great thing is in towns ... like La Cañada Flintridge, you have really nice homes, you have nice facing views in order to install the solar, and the folks get tremendous offset in their utility bill," Schaeffer said.

Schaeffer cited the proximity of JPL as a possible influence on the city's lean toward solar power, but he also added that a key factor is that local power utility Southern California Edison's rebate level is \$1.10 per watt, while Pacific Gas and Electric, which serves other areas of the state, currently offers just 35 cents per watt.

Pasadena and La Crescenta are also serviced by SoCal Edison, however, so it's not just the potential for rebates that encourages locals to participate.

Robert Stanley, director of community development for La Cañada Flintridge, said the city decided to make it easier for residents to install solar power by reducing the cost of building permits, and that seems to be having the desired effect.

“What we’ve done is, we’ve made it basically a flat rate for solar power, at a very low, low rate,” said Stanley. “I can tell you just empirically I’ve been seeing an increase in solar installations in La Cañada.”

By not charging a percentage of the project cost for permits and not making solar installations come before the Design Review Board, the City Council has endorsed the use of solar power here.

“The reason why they reduced the rate was to encourage the solar power,” said Stanley. “They see it’s a benefit for the city — just for the community, in general.”

Schaeffer said Phat Energy has found the city to be extremely cooperative in the permitting process.

But if the city is leading in solar energy, it’s also a local leader in the recycling of batteries.

Heidi Sanborn, executive director of the California Product Stewardship Council, said that when she was looking for businesses to participate in a San Gabriel Valley battery recycling program, La Cañada Flintridge outpaced neighboring cities.

“I was delighted with the response,” said Sanborn. “It was almost unanimous, if I walked into a store they said yes.”

With five locations participating in the battery recycling program, La Cañada Flintridge has as many as Altadena, Pasadena and South Pasadena combined.

“There was a desire to do the right thing that I didn’t see in every city,” said Sanborn.

Stanley said he’s seen firsthand the desire of residents to care for the environment.

“We’ve created a green task force,” said Stanley. “What they did is they focused on what the city could do to improve our sustainability.

Stanley said the task force, which included Planning Commissioner Jonathan Curtis and Design Commissioner Gordon Hoopes, among others, focused on providing information to residents about how to get grants or rebates from utility companies for energy and water conservation.

Stanley said working for conservation isn’t out of character for the residents of La Cañada Flintridge.

“Even before this whole green craze, we had a number of residents that put in their own solar systems,” said Stanley. “They’re concerned about the environment, so they did it on their own.”