

## Living Energy Farm

December 2019 -- January 2020 Newsletter

### Expanding the LEF Model

We are gearing up to leave for the Navajo Nation in a few days. Preparing for installing solar kits in 50 homes in the Navajo and Hopi Nations has stretched us. We have dipped into personal savings and taken on some small private loans to cover expenses. We are going to make this happen. We have been networking with agencies on the ground, and will be doing workshops in Arizona to talk about the differences between durable solar equipment and consumer junk. We will be teaching people how to build and install solar kits. We have named our kits Iron Sun Boxes, and they are unlike anything else on the market. They are durable, repairable, and scalable. If we can get this technology to take root, then it can spread far and wide. The plan to spread our DC Microgrid technologies looks like this. In as much as we can bring media attention to our sustainable model, we will do so. We will send out press releases while we

are in Arizona. (We need to do that in conjunction with the people there.) In as much as we can direct donations to non-profits who can support low-income people living involuntarily off-grid, we can continue building Iron Sun Boxes and distributing them for free. We are pleased to be able to do that. But a realistic assessment of the long-term cash flow needs, and considering the desires of people to live voluntarily off-grid (who can afford to pay for our equipment), we need a plan beyond charitable donations. Nickel iron batteries in particular have to be purchased in large lots (in order to get small sizes and good prices). Charitable groups are not going to be able to do that.

### Living Energy Lights, LLC.

We are forming Living Energy Lights LLC., see [livingenergylights.com](http://livingenergylights.com) The mission of Living Energy Lights is:

- \* To conduct business in such a manner as to maintain profitability.
- \* To sell durable solar lighting equipment, and thereby to empower people who purchase our products to live comfortably without grid power.
- \* To sell durable batteries and other necessary components wholesale to assemblers in low-income areas who



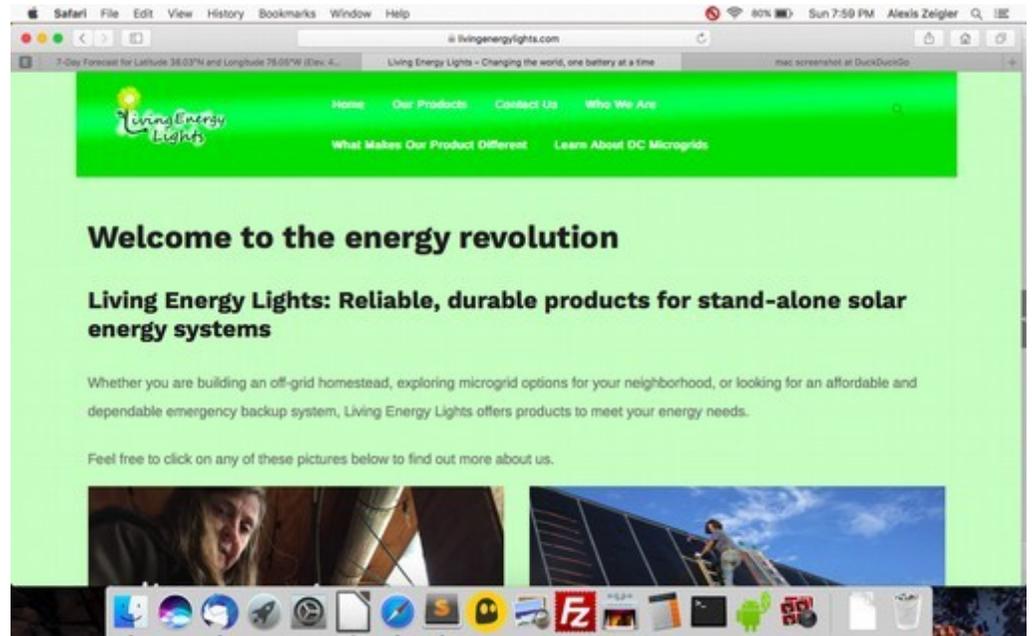
*The Arizona Solar Crew getting geared up and ready to solarize 50 homes. Wish us luck!*

can build solar equipment for low-income consumers. Higher prices will be charged in direct sales to wealthier customers.

Living Energy Lights will be selling:

- \* Iron Sun Boxes, solar kits in several sizes.
- \* DC LED lights.
- \* Cabling, plugs, flashlights, and other useful small add-ons.
- \* DC Refrigerators -- LEL is now a dealer for Sundanzer refrigerators. The Direct Drive Sundanzer is a very well-made machine, and the only refrigerator that has a *zero operational cost* once you set it up.
- \* DC fans.
- \* Nickel Iron batteries, for those who want to build solar kits themselves.
- \* Consulting services for setting up larger daylight drive solar energy systems.

We will be supplying people in Arizona and other areas with low-income populations information about our supply chains -- where we get all of our parts. They can buy parts from wholesalers if they can afford it (with private money or donated money). If they do not have the capital to do that, then Living Energy Lights (LEL) can supply them parts or built-out kits at cost. In as



*Living Energy Lights website, check it out!*

much as donations can be directed to non-profits, LEL can supply those nonprofits with materials (batteries, or built-out kits) that they could not otherwise get. They, in turn, can continue to help low-income people get lights.

The pitfalls of starting an LLC are clear enough; a lack of success, or too much. We will need to sell some products at a profit to make the whole thing work. There are a lot of people who want better off-grid equipment. We need to reach out to them. If we succeed on a bigger scale, we could make living off-grid a lot more appealing to a lot more people. It might be a bit grandiose to say that we could shut down the grid someday, but we certainly don't need it. We need conservationist design, and community scale sharing of resources. We could have a very high level of comfort without an electrical grid and all its attendant environmental destruction. Hopefully, LEL can offer concrete solutions. Conservation is a choice, a philosophy, a spirituality. We hold no illusions about the limits of our technologies. But these same technologies do empower a conservationist philosophy, if people are willing to make that choice.

The other pitfall of starting an LLC concerns the financial pressures of running any business. Startup is going to cost some thousands of dollars. We have a couple of investors and are seeking more. We are not the only idealists in the world, or in the solar business. If one reads the websites and promotional literature of the numerous companies supplying solar equipment in Africa and Asia, they all sound like environmental protection and social justice are their passionate first priorities. For them, for us, reaching low-income people in remote areas is going to be financially challenging. There is pressure for any business to sell to rich people instead of poor people. And many businesses that start with great ideals fall short over time. For us, we are pleased to have some of the core people involved since the inception of LEF involved in LEL as well. This will not be a stock corporation. There will be no "hostile takeover." If our products are so successful that other

companies imitate them, then that's fine. Since we started LEF, we have kept a focus on environmental technologies that are accessible to everyone. We intend to keep doing that.

### **And How's the Farm?**

Being the party animals that we are, we had yet another really great party at Solstice. It was a fantastic family event organized by Brenda, Stephanie, and the rest of the LEF crew. Gingerbread houses were made, and some were taken home by our guests. At our place, a youthful demolition crew set to work after the party converting their houses to food. There was lots of music -- planned and a great jam session. The Solstice Elf appeared and gave out gifts to each child who could charm the elf with a joke. (The standards for humor were not very high.) We gave an unplanned tour to a sizable group of newcomers.



We continue to have a lot of people at LEF, and a lot more wanting to come next year. We love farming. It serves as a solid foundation for our community. But small farming is never all that lucrative. If Living Energy Lights works out well, it could open up more options to bring more people to LEF. But that's only speculation for now.

The kids are doing great. Rosa and Xander go to a cooperative school program at Twin Oaks 4 days a week. The proximity of other communities in Louisa County allows us to do far more than we could otherwise. Nika has become an expert bicycle rider, doing his best to keep up with the older kids. We are trying to figure out the balance of work on Iron Sun Boxes, farming for seeds, and farming for food. We continue to research and develop other projects. We will likely start working on a larger biogas system when we get back from Arizona. We put in a few minutes on the homegrown fueled tractor project when we can.

*Living Energy Farm is a project to build a demonstration farm, community, and education center in Louisa County that uses no fossil fuels. For more information see our website [www.livingenergyfarm.org](http://www.livingenergyfarm.org), or contact us at [livingenergyfarm@gmail.com](mailto:livingenergyfarm@gmail.com) or Living Energy Farm, 1022 Bibb Store Rd, Louisa VA, 23093. Donations to the Living Energy Farm Education Fund are tax deductible.*

### **Articles and videos about LEF:**

**How to Live Without Fossil Fuel (Introductory Video)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ri2U6u8p65E>  
**Powering a Community with Solar Electricity** (LEF has the only DC powered community that we know of,

here's how it works) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvdExgvHnRI&t=23s>

**The Best Way to Store Off-Grid Energy** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wOxQ3sL9zc>

**Batteries that Last (almost) Forever** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfrgLsyFs0E>

Virginia Homegrown created a program at LEF (the LEF part starts at the 29 minute mark in the program)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDGP0C9MIzU>

International Permaculture has done 2 articles on LEF. One is in issue #93, Autumn 2017, and the second is in issue #94, Winter 2017. See <https://www.permaculture.co.uk/>

Article about LEF at the Atlantic Online Magazine

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/anarchism-intentional-communities-trump/513086/>

Article about LEF in The Central Virginian

<http://www.livingenergyfarm.org/cvarticle.pdf>

LEF on CNN

<http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2015/09/us/communes-american-story/>

Cville weekly in Charlottesville VA

<http://www.c-ville.com/off-grid-model-environmentalism-made-easy/#.VcHobF054yo>

First video on youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppTBO8d6jhY>

Second video on youtube

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdSX\\_TIYkD4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdSX_TIYkD4)

Video on vimeo

<https://vimeo.com/128744981>

Slideshow produced by Alexis a while ago

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x\\_C3iScoAw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x_C3iScoAw)