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Solar Features, Part III: It's Not All About Economics for Solar Enthusiasts

The first time I met Steve Stevens was when his Golden home was on the 2007 Tour of Solar Homes. He is such an enthusiast for sustainable living that he even cooks most of his meals outside directly with the sun (using mirrors). I remember eating a couple cookies which he had baked in a "Sun Oven."

Since then, Steve has invited me to his home numerous times to take in his latest effort to get well past "net zero" on overall home energy usage. You'll recognize his home by the Prius in his driveway (the license plate says "PLUG IN") with an electric cord attached. Steve doesn't let Xcel burn any coal to charge his converted Prius, and he gets 90 to 100 miles per gallon. It is charged using surplus electricity from the photovoltaic panels on his home's roof.

Steve's extensive use of low-wattage LED lighting and Energy

Star appliances has cut his household electrical usage so much that he has electricity to spare for the Prius, while still selling 8,623 surplus kilowatt-hours to Xcel in 2009 alone..

A retired Bell Labs engineer, Steve now devotes his time to further pushing his carbon footprint into negative ground, *not only because it makes long-term economic sense*, but because it's the right thing to do. "We owe it to future generations," he'll tell you.

Steve took his 1979 ranch-style home well past net zero in terms of electricity in 2007. He then intensified his attack on the use of natural gas for heating. He has an evaporative cooler in what used to be an exterior window before he built his new sunroom. That cooler now does double duty, running "dry" on sunny winter days to pump the

sun's warmth throughout the house.

Steve's sunroom was built from recycled/cull materials purchased at Habitat Outlets and other building material recyclers. Reusing materials rather than buying new is a core principle of sustainable living.

He hand dug four feet deep around his foundation walls and installed 4-inch foam insulation. He blew insulation into his ceilings to R-100 and into his exterior walls to between R-15 and R-60. He installed six large "sun tunnels" (reflective tubular skylights) to eliminate the need for daytime electric lighting. By enclosing and insulating his porch, Steve created an "air lock" entry. As a result, Xcel now pays Steve more than Steve pays Xcel for energy year after year.

Steve feels that energy savings is the right place to invest both his time and money, as well as providing personal and national energy security, and assuring what Steve calls "generational justice."

This Week's Featured New Listing:

2-Story Green Mountain Estates Gem

This picture, taken after Monday's snow storm, doesn't do justice to this home's landscaping. The address is 871 S. Arbutus Street, in the heart of Green Mountain Estates, a mature neighborhood on the east-facing slope of Green Mountain, west of Alameda Parkway. Things you'll like about this home include its beautifully landscaped (and private) backyard with a 17'x22' covered wood deck, the gleaming hardwood flooring, four upstairs bedrooms, a 12'x29' family room with gas fireplace, and an 11'x27' game/fitness room with rubber flooring in the finished basement. The oversized 2-car garage includes a workshop. A video tour will be on its web page shortly.



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