

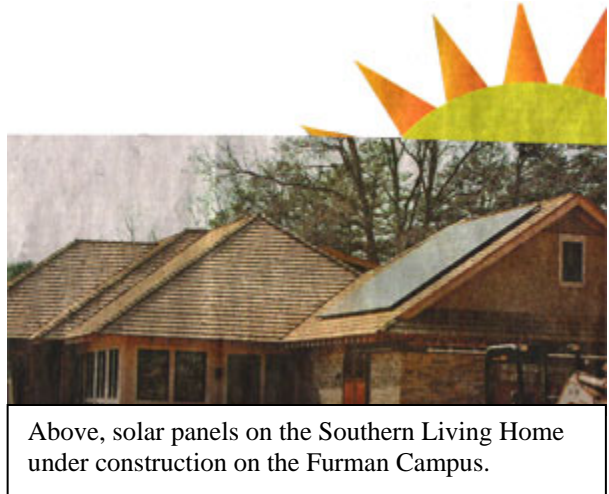
Here Comes the Sun

Solar power has a new look,
new accessibility

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Above, solar panels on the Southern Living Home under construction on the Furman Campus.

By its very nature power generation is perilous and environmentally damaging.

Coal burns dirty and pollutes the air. Nuclear reactors pose the possibility of leaks, or worse, a meltdown. Dam a river to power a turbine and you can ruin the fishery and damage the ecosystem downstream.

Like a bright beacon of hope, solar power stands alone as a green source of energy.

So why aren't people harnessing the sun's power to heat water, cool homes and run refrigerators?

Good question.

The folks at Furman University building the 3,000 square foot Cliffs Cottage- a Southern Living Showcase Home that is a model for "green" design, renewable energy and sustainable products, building methods and materials- say there are many reasons.

"Power is so cheap here" said Ed Marshall, Furman's Director of special products, and one of the people shepherding the Southern Living Home toward its June 1 completion date. "Out West, power costs 30 cents per kilowatt hour and in the Southeast it costs 8 cents.

"Solar power is expensive on our part of the world because of low costs of energy here."

Yet Households in the Southeast use power at a higher rate than nearly any other place in the country, Marshall said.

It's cool enough that we need to use heat in the winter, and our summers are hot and humid that we have to constantly cool are homes. That double demand- and the low costs of power- have turned us into gluttons.

“We have one of the cheapest retail rates for power in the country,” said David Odell, project manager for the solar aspects of the house and owner of Sunstore Solar Energy Solutions in Greer, “yet we we’ve got the fifth highest power bills of any state.”

One reason people don’t use solar power is a lack of awareness, Odell said.

“People think it’s only for tree huggers,” he said “That’s because solar looked so ugly in the 1970’s. There have been so many advancements now. We can retrofit a house and make it blend in, or we can it into new construction.”

The Greenville News Saturday, April 5, 2008