BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

San Diego Solar helps people take control of their energy future

As solar energy becomes more accessible to more residents and businesses, San Diego Solar has been there to meet customer needs and help shape the future of energy. In a Q&A, CEO Curtis Williamson discussed trends in solar over the years, the company's founding and its philosophy for customer service.



The San Diego Solar team at its yearly employee gathering. **COURTESY OF SAN DIEGO SOLAR**

Q. How has demand and public interest in solar changed in California over the more than 30 years the company has been in business?

Williamson: Solar in California has seen a lot of ups and downs. Early systems cost three to four times what they do today, and they were all designed around charging lead-acid batteries. Then came the first wave of grid-tied systems — expensive, but paired with large state rebates. Since then we've gone through the transition from Net Energy Metering 1 to NEM 2 and now to Net Billing 3, plus all the disruption tied to foreign manufacturing and tariffs, including materials held at port and released just in time to complete large installations. The industry always seems to bounce back, because it fundamentally works and people believe in their energy future. At its core, this business is about helping people reach their goals, and that makes it a genuinely fun industry to be in.

Q. What are some key considerations for people thinking about going solar?

Williamson: The most important thing is choosing the right contractor. A lot of companies have come and gone in this industry over the years, and a lot of the good ones remain. Homeowners should choose someone they trust — someone who will design a system that meets their needs now and as those needs grow over time.

Q. What does San Diego Solar offer that customers might not get from national chains or other companies?

Williamson: Most of our conversations with customers center on where they see their homes in five to 10 years. Are they planning to add an electric vehicle, a heat pump AC unit, or an electric water heater? Are they focused on backup power, or more on peak shaving and utility bill optimization? No two customers are the same, and no two solar arrays are designed the same. At San Diego Solar, we ask a lot of questions and listen closely to what our customers want, then build a system that actually fits them.

Q. What challenges and opportunities did you see when you took over as CEO this year?

Williamson: I've been working with the Hosmer family, who founded San Diego Solar, since 2012. The original company started in 1996 and was later incorporated as San Diego Solar in 2012. They're great people who have taught me a lot about solar and this industry. The Hosmers remain close friends and we still surf together on occasion.

One of the biggest challenges has been the perception that people "missed the boat" on going solar. That couldn't be further from the truth — there are more solar programs available now than ever, and in many cases solar is cheaper and easier to get into than it was one, two, or even five years ago. When we walk people through the process, the investment, and the payback, the reaction is almost always, "Wow, this is a great deal."

The other thing we've noticed is how many systems in San Diego are now 10, 15, even 25 years old — some of them systems we installed ourselves. We're talking with customers, and with other companies' former customers, about repairing and upgrading those systems. That can be challenging, since older technology has been replaced by smaller, faster components. But we want people to know they have someone reliable to call when a panel or inverter needs fixing, so they can get the most out of their investment over the long haul.

Q. Does the company have any particular short- or long-term goals?

Williamson: Short term, we'd like to see the market stabilize the way other home services industries have. Long term, we want to move into solar-led whole-home electrification. A lot of homeowners are considering heat pumps and electric water heaters that integrate with their solar arrays, and we'd love to be at the forefront of that shift in home services.

For more information, visit www.sandiegosolar.com, call 619-514-0095, or email info@sandiegosolar.com. San Diego Solar serves all of San Diego County.

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