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Former Mayor Bob Delves Now 'Energy-Neutral'

BY MARTINIQUE DAVIS

MOUNTAIN VILLAGE – Three years after issuing the Telluride Renewed Challenge with Telluride Mayor Stu Fraser, former Mountain Village Mayor Bob Delves has reached his goal of achieving 100 percent alternative offset at his Mountain Village home.

The challenge, a joint endeavor of the two governments, seeks to create enough new and local renewable electricity to supply 100 percent of the two towns' electricity consumption by 2020. Delves and his wife Jenny took on the endeavor as a personal challenge, in an effort to prove that significant changes in energy behavior can happen when individuals commit themselves to conservation goals.

Delves says he took on the energy-neutral challenge because he wanted to see what, exactly, was possible in terms of energy savings in a traditionally built, 5,200-square-foot mountain home. What he discovered has surprised him – and, he hopes, will inspire others to consider taking the challenge, as well.

"This is not a government problem or a utility problem; it's personal. So I challenged everyone in the community, including myself, to take responsibility for their own actions," Delves says of the impetus behind the Telluride Renewed challenge, and of his own quest to achieve energy neutral status at his home.

While the house on Russell Drive in Mountain Village was designed without much superfluous space, taking full advantage



ENERGY NEUTRAL – Solar panels cover part of the roof of former Mountain Village mayor Bob Delves' home. Three years after taking on the challenge, Delves has offset 100 percent of his home's energy use with renewables. (Photo by Brett Schreckengost)

of sunny southern exposures for passive solar gain, energy conservation was not the couple's foremost concern when their home was being designed and constructed. They embarked upon their journey to offset and reduce their energy consumption as much as possible long after moving in.

One of the biggest changes was the installation of 24 180-watt photovoltaic solar panels, with a total generating capacity of 4,320 watts (4.32 kilowatts), or about 50 percent of the home's post-conservation consumption. Next, the couple and their three sons took a hard look at their energy-consuming behavior, and initiated a series of changes that took yet another significant bite out of their energy usage. By being conscious

of certain behaviors – like hanging their clothes instead of using the electric dryer, avoiding using unnecessary "show" lighting and installing energy-efficient bulbs throughout the house, setting the thermostat to low in unused spaces of the house and turning off the icemaker and draining and turning off the hot tub, the family realized more energy savings – and by 2010 were halfway to their goal of being 100 percent energy neutral.

Then, in 2012, the San Miguel Power Association unveiled its Community Energy Collective, a large solar farm in Paradox Valley. The Delves determined how many panels were needed to offset the remaining 50 percent of their electricity consumption, and then purchased 18 panels from CEC.

On any given day, Delves can get on his laptop computer or smart phone and assess how both his rooftop solar panels and those at the Paradox solar farm are performing. The savings, he says, have been significant: On many days of the year, the electricity generated by the roof-mounted panels actually runs their home's electric meter in reverse; all electricity produced by the solar farm panels is metered and its generation is factored in versus consumption at the home meter via their billing system.

With all the solar farm panels, roof-mounted panels and conservation efforts in place last winter, the Delves discovered that it was, indeed, possible to reach the 100 percent energy neutral goal, even at a large, conventionally built home high in the mountains.