

SoPas site energizing with solar panels

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SOUTH PASADENA -- One of the city's most prominent business leaders has gone solar -- in a big way.

Entrepreneur and commercial developer Jeffrey Burke will complete the installation this week of what Southern California Edison has called the largest commercial solar-power system in the Pasadena area.

Packed tightly atop of the roof Burke's company at 99 Pasadena Ave. are 200 solar panels capable of generating enough electricity each year to power 10 average houses, according to the project's specifications.

The array, which costs about \$300,000 before government rebates and tax credits, is expected to provide about a quarter of the electricity needed for the 16,000-square-foot building, which is home to the digital-imaging company JupiterMedia.

Burke said the decision to undertake the project was based largely on a desire to clean up the Earth for his children.

"As much as I can, I really want to do the right thing in trying to leave a world my kids can live in," he said. "It sounds like a real platitude, but I really believe that."

But his decision wasn't entirely altruistic. Burke estimates he will make his money back through energy savings within eight to 10 years.

"And with gas prices shooting up, it could be sooner," he said. "If you've got the cash to invest into your property over time, it not only breaks even, but after break-even time, you're making money."

Burke also expects the solar installation will boost the overall value of his building.

Burke and his wife, Lorraine Triolo, made headlines in 2005 when they sold their imaging company, PictureArts, to JupiterMedia for \$63.2million in cash.

Jupiter's 60 employees moved into the Pasadena Avenue building, but the couple retained ownership of the building in the deal.

Once up and running, the solar panels are expected to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide emitted into the air each year by nearly 67,000 pounds.

South Pasadena Mayor Michael Cacciotti said the project is a boon to the city.

"The effort to curb climate change must be undertaken by all segments of our society - from the government to the private sector," he said. "Jeffrey Burke and Lorraine Triolo's use of solar power - a clean, abundant and renewable resource - is a great example of entrepreneurial leadership and establishes an environmental benchmark for other businesses to follow."

The new solar system represents a first step in the redevelopment at 99 Pasadena Ave., located in a business park area known as the "Ostrich Farm" district.

Burke and Triolo have begun construction on a new three-story, 20,000-square-foot building on property acquired from the city of South Pasadena, to be attached to the existing structure. The addition will have a solar array of its own.

While still in preliminary stages, Burke said he and Triolo are looking into the possibility of harvesting wind power for the building, using new micro-turbine technology.

"Whatever we can do," Burke said, "we'll do."