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‘The planet is on fire.’ Learn about Marblehead’s sole net-negative home

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Leigh Blander

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Leigh Blander is an experienced TV, radio and print journalist who has written hundreds of stories for local newspapers, including the Marblehead Reporter. She also works as a PR specialist.



Lisa Wolf outside her net negative home PHOTO: Leigh Blander

Walk past Lisa and Steve Wolf’s home on Pitman Road and you might notice a peace sign, four feet in diameter and outlined in lights, on the front slope of their roof. What’s harder to notice, surprisingly, are the 44 solar

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panels lining the roof's southeast side. The panels deliver enough power to make the home the only net-negative residence in town, according to the Wolfs. Net negative means the Wolfs produce more electricity than they use.

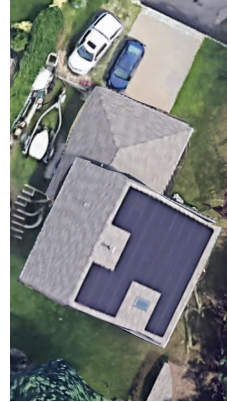
In fact, the couple sells extra energy back to the Marblehead Municipal Light Department (MMLD).

"We have a \$600 credit with MMLD right now," Lisa Wolf said.

Lisa grew up in Marblehead and earned a master's degree in environmental engineering. She and Steve, who works for the federal Environmental Protection Agency in Boston, moved back to town in 2016 and built their 2,500-square-house with energy efficiency in mind.

In addition to the 44 solar panels, they have:

- Two electric heat pumps
- An electric induction stove
- High-efficiency insulation
- Energy Star appliances
- An electric vehicle and a charger



An aerial view of the Wolfs' roof with 44 solar panels



Wolf shows off her electric induction stove PHOTO: Leigh Blander





Wolf charging her electric vehicle

Lisa says the extra focus on energy efficiency didn't slow down the construction process at all. And the solar panels, which cost \$31,000 after tax incentives, have paid for themselves.

"We save about \$2,500 a year on electricity and earn about \$2,500 a year selling SRECs," which are traded renewable energy certificates. The solar panels will generate a 14-16% return on investment over 30 years, Lisa said.

'The planet is on fire'

The Wolfs have always been interested in sustainability. Lisa worked at an environmental consulting firm before teaching physics and engineering at Beverly High for many years. She is now the Sustainability Coordinator for the Wellesley Municipal Light Department. She also volunteers with Sustainable Marblehead and the Marblehead Light Commission.

Why is this issue so important to her?

"The planet is on fire," she told Marblehead News in a recent interview in her home. "When I started in environmental engineering 30 years ago, the tipping point was just a concept. Now, glaciers are disappearing, tundra is thawing, the world is either on fire or in drought."

More solar power?



The federal government recently increased tax credits for solar panels to 30%, which Wolf hopes will encourage more people to look into solar power. Right now about 63 homes in Marblehead have solar panels, an increase of about 10 in the last year. For anyone interested, Lisa says a good place to start is [EnergySage.com](#), where people can type in their address and estimate the cost and savings of installing solar panels.

If solar panels are too big a commitment right now, Lisa recommends smaller steps like getting a free energy audit to identify ways to use less energy. Learn more about that [HERE](#). Also, she encourages people to shift their energy use to off-peak as much as possible. Off-peak hours are Monday-Friday, 9 p.m. – 8 a.m., and all day Saturday and Sunday.

Lisa also strongly suggests people look at updating their home heating systems from gas or oil to air source heat pumps.

She hopes Marblehead will hire a sustainability coordinator soon to develop and lead new green initiatives.

“We all need to eliminate fossil fuels from our lives. Eventually everyone has to get on board.”

Sustainable Marblehead and the Unitarian Church are hosting a program, “Saving Energy, Saving Money, and Protecting the Planet This Winter,” on Sunday, Nov. 13, at 3p.m. at 28 Mugford Street.

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The Wolfs' solar panels



The Wolfs' electric heat pumps PHOTO: Leigh Blander



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