

Pulaski Startup Turns on Solar Parking Array

A first-in-the-Southeast solar project started generating power in southern Middle Tennessee. An awning of solar panels creates shaded parking and a way to charge electric vehicles. The solar array came online with the flip of a few breakers followed by the silence of turning sunlight into useable electricity.

When electric vehicles aren't plugged in, the Tennessee Valley Authority will buy the power generated – *enough to run four houses*. That, plus government incentives, puts the payback for this \$200,000 project at less than a year and a half, says Wilson Stevenson of Outpost Solar in Pulaski. The company's first project covers 10 spaces in its own parking lot. Wilson says it's a demonstration that already has customers lining up for one of their own.

"People were hesitant. But quite honestly, we think it's beautiful. It's functional. When you can see it, touch it, feel it, you're more comfortable with it."

Parking lot solar arrays have grown popular out west, but not in the Southeast. Here, homes and businesses interested in solar have more often used rooftop units. Stevenson says there's usually more space to cover a parking area, plus the panels have to be removed if and when the roof needs repairs.

"Do you want shaded parking with electric vehicle plug-in capacity, or do you want to put the stuff on your roof and have the system last longer than your roof? It's a no-brainer for us."

Outpost Solar has contracts to build five more systems in Knoxville – at a marina, a restaurant and other commercial buildings. Right now, Oak Ridge National Lab is working on a charging station design