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The Source for Solar, Wind, and Other Energy Resources

At the Car Wash: An Interview with GJ Solar President Joe Gamliel

By Marilyn Pitts



GJ Electric Solar's Joe Gamliel points at the solar system his company installed at Valley Car Wash.

When Joe Gamliel, president of Los Angeles-based GJ Solar, was asked that his company had just finished installing a 100 KW photovoltaic system for a car wash, making it the first car wash in the world to operate on solar power, we were intrigued. Where was this car wash? What convinced them to go solar? What did the project involve?

To find out the answers, we went to the source—Joe Gamliel. The car wash in question, he informed us, was Valley Car Wash located on Van Nuys Boulevard in Van Nuys, Calif. A longtime solar advocate, Joe is enthusiastic about solar energy—in fact, it is his enthusiasm that got him involved in the car wash project.

ConnectPress: Why did the owner of the car wash decide on solar? And how did they hear about your company? [[BANNER_MART

Joe: I was at one of the car washes for car wash service and was waiting I met one of the partners [of Valley Car Wash], Scott Scott saw the sign on my car (free electricity), and he asked, “Do

this really work?”

I convinced him that this is the best investment. I told him, “When you buy a car, you lose money from day one, but with a solar system you make money from day one.” I told him that no one in the world gives you a warranty for 25 years. I told him that within 10 years when everybody will pay three times [their current] electric bill, you will pay nothing—and you can compete and lower your price. Scott said, “Let’s have a working meeting.”

ConnectPress: What did the installation involve?

Joe: We designed the system set-up for Sharp 200 watt modules, but Sharp couldn’t deliver, so we had to redesign the set-up for Sharp 175 watt. We installed the system on two roofs at the car wash. Roof 1 is the main building where the tunnel is and roof 2 is where the service shops are.

ConnectPress: Did the installation have any challenges? How did your company handle those challenges?

Joe: The main challenge was the tunnel roof. There was no roof to set the system on. We had to cut the columns and frame the structure so there would be a base to lay the system on.

ConnectPress: How was the project coordinated with the car wash company?

Joe: The project was coordinated very well. The car wash never stopped working. We had to work around the car wash schedule. Trenching and digging were done at night so we wouldn’t block the driveway.

ConnectPress: How long did the installation take?

Joe: It took three months including the new frame, installation and connection. Without the framing, it would have take two months.

ConnectPress: How many people were on the crew that did the installation?

Joe: The crew was six guys—a foreman, an electrician and a hardware installation crew, which helped on wiring, too.

ConnectPress: I know that WorldWater & Power Corp. was involved in this project. How did that occur—and how was coordinated?

Joe: There is a shortage on modules. It was to the benefit of WorldWater & Power and GJSolar [to work together]. WorldWater & Power wanted to get into the California market through GJ by supplying panels and sharing the profit on project. The VP Sales at WorldWater, Doug Washington, was smart enough to purchase panels from Sharp ahead of

The coordination between myself and WorldWater was with one of the finest and well-known specialists in the solar industry, Dr. Neway Argaw, Ph.D. I enjoyed working with him, and I know him from previous projects.

ConnectPress: What percentage of the car wash's energy needs are now being met by the system?

Joe: About 95 percent.

ConnectPress: What was the total cost of the installation?

Joe: The installation was about \$100K.

ConnectPress: Did the owner receive a rebate for the installation?

Joe: The owner got \$300,000 from the gas company and will get about \$225,000 from LADWP (Los Angeles Department of Water and Power).

ConnectPress: So what has been the owner's response to this new solar power system for his company?

Joe: The owner is planning on other car washes he owns to run on solar, too.

ConnectPress: What are some of the projects you have done in the past?

Joe: We did an apartment building in Brentwood and a warehouse in Carson. We installed some residential systems as well. You can see some photos [of GJ Solar projects] on the GJ Web site.

ConnectPress: What new projects does GJ Solar have in the works?

Joe: The new projects we are starting in the next few months are for LA Baking (140KW), one of the largest bakeries in Los Angeles, and West Pico Foods (44,000 square feet, 315 KW), a large cooling warehouse storage for food. We're doing about 15 small projects of 3-5 KW for residential customers.

These days we're looking to get involved in manufacturing. The demand is high, and the solar module supply is short.

We are also in the process of working on some very large international projects, like Spain and Israel. Each project is 100 megawatts.

ConnectPress: How long has your company been involved in solar energy?

Joe: I have been in the solar industry since the '70s. At GJ Solar we struggled for years trying to convince customers

solar is the future and it is the best investment, but people were not ready. Now is the time... We all know that oil price will increase in the future, and that it will affect the price of electricity. In this century, without power we can't survive, so we must think about the solution now before it is too late.

GJ Solar is an authorized dealer and certified installer for major manufacturers, and a certified installer by LADWP (Los Angeles Department of Water and Power) and other major utility companies.

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