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FEATURED

## Whitesville Solar company starting to grow

By Keith Lawrence Messenger-Inquirer Oct 21, 2018

Photo by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer/awarren@messenger-inquirer.com Clint Merritt of Driven Solar of Whitesville, wipes some debris off of one of 42 LG neon solar panels his company installed outside of Todd Aud's home in eastern Daviess County.

Alan Warren

When the Kentucky House of Representatives began debating House Bill 227 last winter, it spurred demand for solar energy.

And that let Clint Merritt quit his job at a Beaver Dam automotive plant and devote full time to his Driven Solar company.

The proposed legislation, which died in the Senate Natural Resources & Energy Committee, would have allowed utility companies to use wholesale prices of electricity rather than retail to credit homes with solar panels that produce excess energy.

The solar industry said the bill would lower the compensation utilities give customers with solar panels from 10 cents for each kilowatt-hour of electricity the panels produce to 3 cents.

But existing customers would be grandfathered into the old rate for 25 years.

So people interested in solar decided to act quickly.

"There was so much demand that I quit my job in May and started doing this full time," Merritt said. "We were covered up with work. It was a blessing, but we were really busy. And we're still busy."

He said, "We've grown steady enough in the past year to create two more positions at the first of 2019."

A Whitesville native, Merritt graduated from Western Kentucky University with a degree in electrical engineering.

"I worked for a framing company building houses and another company roofing homes during my college career," he said. "At the time, it was tough, but it's very clear to me now that the education in 'work' and the education in going to school are both equally important. Both of those jobs plus college are completely related for me now that I'm running a solar business."

Merritt said, "I've always had a unique attraction to solar. It's a passion I have. During college, I was soldering up small solar cells for iPhone chargers. After graduation, my first job was designing circuit boards for various applications."

He and his wife, Brandi, moved back to Whitesville after college.

Merritt said he wanted to install solar cells at their house, "but solar was much more expensive then, for both materials and labor. So I did it all myself and bought used equipment."

Two years ago, he started working on the side doing a few solar installs.

"Last year, I obtained the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners accreditation, which made us a national solar sales, design and installation business," Merritt said.

About 30 homes so far

So far, he said he's done solar installations at about 30 homes in the Owensboro- Henderson- Evansville area.

Merritt has gone as far as Morgantown for an installation.

He's in the process of branching out to Bowling Green and Louisville.

And in a couple of weeks, Merritt will be heading to South Carolina for a job.



"Although solar can reduce or eliminate your electric bill altogether, it's still a big investment," he said. "When we do a job in South Carolina, we have to mark up our cost to cover the expense associated with traveling and travel time."

That happens here when outside companies come in to do a job, Merritt said.

"Every install we've performed here, compared to out-sourcing, has been much less expensive for our customers," he said. "Aside from local travel savings, we try to group customers together when ordering materials and then pass the bulk pricing down to our customers."

Some customers save \$300 a month on their electricity bills during the summer when there's a lot of sunshine and a little less in winter when there are more cloudy days, Merritt said.

That adds up to several thousand dollars a year, he said.

"Every project is different," Merritt said. "I've done them for \$5,000 and I've done them for \$30,000. I'd say the average is around \$15,000 to \$20,000. We try to get them to where the savings will pay for them in seven or eight years."

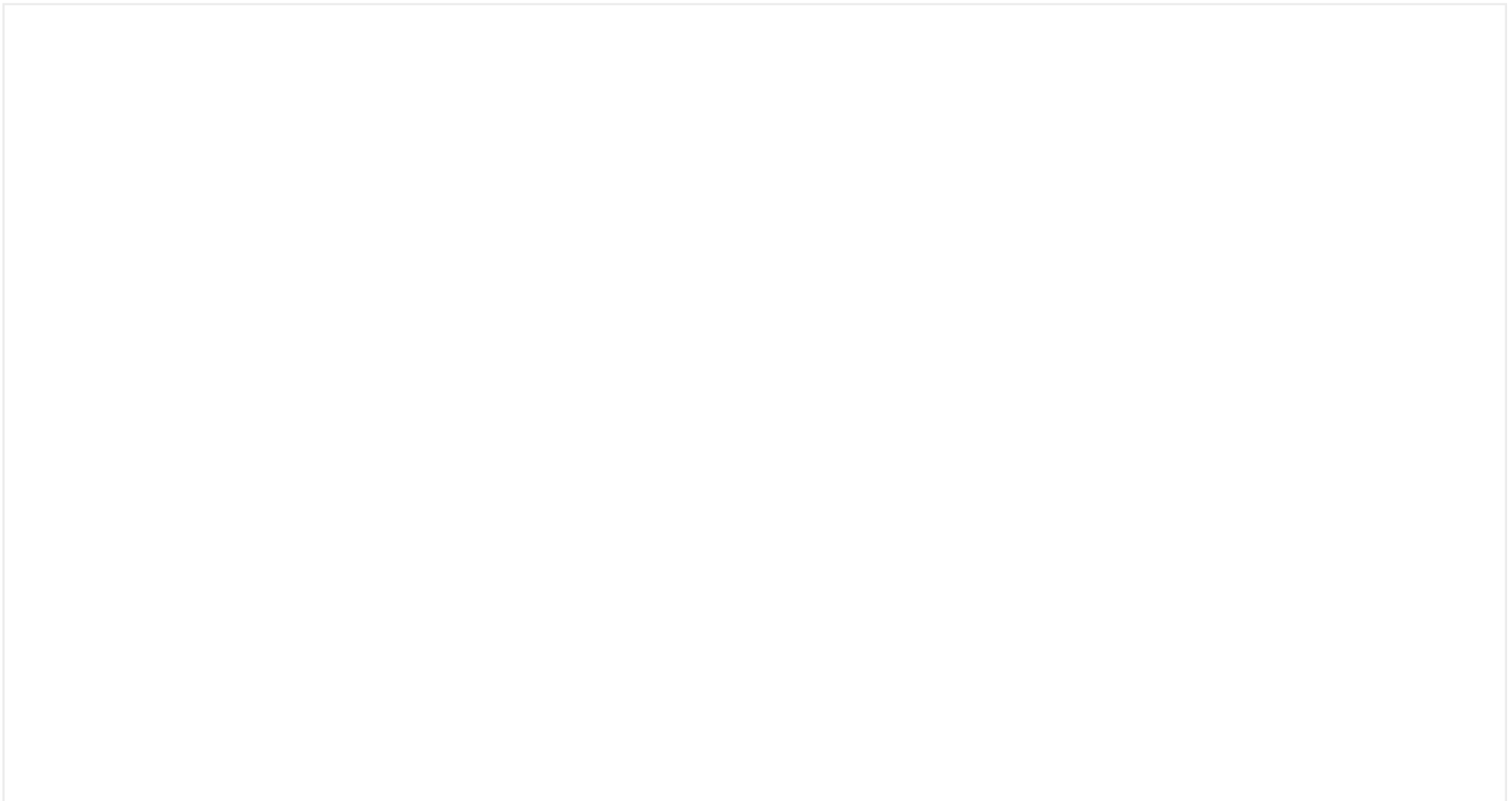
The federal solar tax credit lets people deduct 30 percent of the cost of installing a solar system from their federal taxes.

It stays at 30 percent through 2019, drops to 26 percent in 2020, 22 percent in 2021 and 10 percent in 2022.

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## **Video and Slideshows**

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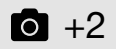


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