

PORTOLA VALLEY MAN charged with
manslaughter in fatal car crash. Page 8

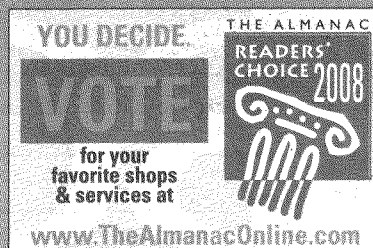
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BUSINESS GOES SOLAR

Ron Newdell is pushing the solar bandwagon for businesses. For starters, 2,388 solar panels totally power Edison Technology Park. And he runs an art gallery.

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RON NEWDOLL'S ENTERPRISES GO SOLAR

Newdoll Enterprises of North Fair Oaks earns county Green Business certificate. His Edison Technology Park is totally powered by the sun. He also runs an art gallery.

STORY BY MARION SOFTKY
PHOTOS BY VERONICA WEBER

For Ron Newdollar of Woodside, going solar is a no-brainer.

The results of that conviction are highly visible over in North Fair Oaks, squeezed between Edison Way and the railroad tracks. Almost an acre of bright blue solar panels covers the roofs and provides shade to Newdollar Enterprises and Mr. Newdollar's Edison Technology Park.

"We have a 400 kilowatt photovoltaic solar installation that provides 100 percent of the power requirements for an 85,000-square-foot industrial center with four buildings," Mr. Newdollar says. "One hundred percent of our electricity and power comes from the sun."

In April, Newdollar Enterprises, which designs and manufactures solar power equipment, earned one of San Mateo County's first Green Business certificates for unincorporated areas.

Kim Springer, resource conservation manager for the county's RecycleWorks, admires Mr. Newdollar for his unique relations with his tenants. "Ron works with his tenants as a community to conserve resources, whether it's recycling, energy efficiency, or water conservation," he says.

Mr. Newdollar wants his next building to be the greenest in the Bay Area. Due to start construction this year just south of the current four, the 40,000 square-foot building will incorporate solar heating and air conditioning, generation of electricity from excess steam, capturing rain water for landscaping and toilet flushing, and maximum use of recycled materials. "So nothing's wasted," he says.

"We're shooting to make it a LEED Platinum building," Mr. Newdollar says, referring to the top rating in the green building rating system known as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design).

Mr. Newdollar's passions are contagious. They extend far beyond the solar future, to music, technology and art. Over a long career, he's been a radar expert and has run a company for 40-plus years that still builds recording equipment and studios around the world.

Newdollar Enterprise's main office at 3515-B Edison Way opens into an art gallery. The visitor enters a large room ringed by elegant stone Shona carvings from Zimbabwe. The walls are splashed with bright paintings on biotech themes by artist Julie Newdollar, Mr. Newdollar's daughter.

Mr. Newdollar's enthusiasm for all his projects seems boundless. "I'm so excited about what I do that it just bubbles over," he says.

RADAR TO MUSIC TO SOLAR

Ron Newdollar grew up in the San Fernando Valley when it was still orchards and vineyards.

Ron joined the California Air National Guard when he was 17 and still in high school. A couple of training sessions in radar electronics at Biloxi, Mississippi, and a couple of years at Burbank City College launched young Mr. Newdollar into a career in radar.

In 1959 Mr. Newdollar found himself in Redwood City at Ampex. While there he met and married co-worker Agnes Leon, a Redwood City girl who dreamed of living in Woodside. He also began lecturing around the world under contract to the Air Force on the operation and maintenance of recording equipment.

In 1961, Mr. Newdollar was offered "a job I couldn't refuse" as a GS-13 (a high civil service rank) with the Air Force at San Angelo, Texas. "I was 23," he says.

Mr. Newdollar hadn't been with the Air Force long before he started moonlighting. He set up a small recording studio.

"My first effort went gold — talk about luck!" he says, showing a framed gold 45 rpm recording of "The Last Kiss," a rock-and-roll song performed by J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers, which sold at least two million copies. It hangs the wall of his office. "I still enjoy showing it to people. Sometimes they start singing it to me," he chuckles.

Mr. Newdollar's recording business, which became the company Accurate Sound, did so well that he could leave the Air Force, and eventually the young family moved move back to the Bay Area "We decided we weren't Texans at heart," he says.

"The Last Kiss" got me interested in the music business," Mr. Newdollar says. Through Accurate Sound, now part of Newdollar Enterprises, he manufactured

recording equipment and built recording studios all over the world. He has put in studios for household names like Ray Charles, the Mommas and the Poppas, and Joe South. "I still love the business," he says.

The Newdollars moved to Woodside in 1973. Their four children attended Woodside Elementary School and Woodside High School. They have two grandchildren and one on the way.

The Newdollars run the business as a team, Mr. Newdollar says. Ms. Newdollar does the accounting. They moved Accurate Sound from Texas to Fifth Avenue in Redwood City, where they manufactured equipment and put in a recording studio.

In 1978, Mr. Newdollar bought the commercial complex on Edison Way, and in 1980 he moved in. The complex expanded with two new buildings in the 1980s. Now it has 30 tenants in 50 spaces. "We're full," Mr. Newdollar says.

Mr. Newdollar loves his tenants; it appears his tenants like him. "They never want to leave unless they're forced to," he says. "There's a synergy."

Tenants at Edison Technology Park range from contractors and a patent attorney to a landscape architect, high-tech companies in electronics and biotech, and Dieter's German Car Repair.

It was later that Mr. Newdollar was bitten by the solar bug. He took note as the government and PG&E began providing more incentives to install solar power. His passion for high tech kicked in.

"I ran the numbers and decided that putting solar on the roof was a good fiscal move," he says. "It would also benefit the environment."

ADVANCING SOLAR

During 2004, Edison Technology Park installed more than 2,388 solar modules from three different manufacturers on the roofs of its four buildings, and wired them into the electrical system. They produce almost 400,000 kilowatts of peak power, and generate 570,000 kilowatt hours of renewable electricity a year, according to a company brochure.

Electric meters that run both forward and backward symbolize Newdollar's complicated relationship with PG&E. The meters run forward in winter when the complex is using more power than it generates. In summer, the solar system exports enough energy to power more than 100 homes in nearby Atherton and Redwood City neighborhoods, the brochure explains.

Once a year the bill is "trued up," Mr. Newdollar says. The problem is that the Newdollar complex pays PG&E for the power it buys in the winter, but PG&E doesn't pay for the power it gains in the summer.

"They don't even say thank you. We just lose it," he grumbles. "There's no incentive to install more solar because they won't pay you for it."

Mr. Newdollar is supporting new legislation so PG&E, or other electric companies, will have to pay the producer for power delivered to its system.

While the economics of installing solar power were favorable for Mr. Newdollar, they may be tougher for other businesses, he notes.

Mr. Newdollar had two advantages that a more struggling company might not have. He grew up with a family of contractors, so he was familiar with construction. He was able to be his own general contrac-

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The Brush with Science Gallery at the headquarters of Newdollar Enterprises features mystical medical paintings by Julie Newdollar, Ron Newdollar's daughter, and Shona sculpture obtained from Zimbabwe as barter for a recording studio. On top is "Spindles of Necessity," showing the goddess of cell division splitting a cell.

'BRUSH WITH SCIENCE'

Art gallery at solar company shows biotech paintings and Shona sculpture from Zimbabwe

By Marion Softky

Almanac Staff Writer

It's a real surprise to enter a high-tech solar company in Edison Technology Park, and find a lively display of bright paintings on biotech themes, and dozens of elegant stone carvings by Shona sculptors from Zimbabwe.

Welcome to "Brush with Science Gallery" at 3515B Edison Way in North Fair Oaks. It is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekdays.

Ron Newdollar of Woodside has used the entrance to his corporate offices to display two groups of art pieces in a gallery that will soon present lectures and be open for events.

Julie Newdollar, a microbiologist and medical illustrator, has mounted a striking display of paintings with biological themes on the walls of her father's office. Her paintings show Native American folklore, Japanese kimonos decorated with biotech symbols, and Greek mythology, says Mr. Newdollar during a tour.

Ms. Newdollar's pictures have appeared on the covers of dozens of biotech magazines, her father says proudly. And she does paintings on commission from doctors all over the world. Her images merge life science and culture, myths and molecules,

according to her Web site, brushwith-science.com.

The Zimbabwe sculptures, as carved by generations from the Shona tribe, reflect in polished stone the shapes and spirits of animals and people. One sculpture shows three giraffes with gracefully entwined necks. Others are birdbaths, each with a small carved hippo to enjoy the water.

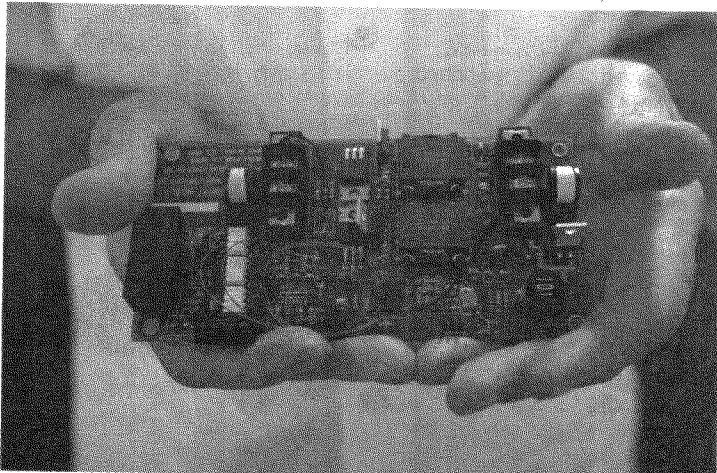
Mr. Newdollar acquired the collection by a kind of fluke — it's called barter.

His company, Accurate Sound, sells recording equipment all over the world. When a potential customer in Zimbabwe wanted to buy a recording studio, he couldn't pay. "Their money is worthless," Mr. Newdollar says.

So they finally agreed to trade. Accurate Sound shipped a 20-foot cargo container full of recording equipment to the customer in Zimbabwe. In return, Mr. Newdollar received a 20-foot cargo container stuffed with 10 tons of Shona carvings.

Mr. Newdollar plans to open the gallery soon for programs and lectures. "We'll be able to give lectures on Shona and artwork and my other passion, which is solar," he says.

For information on the Brush with Science Gallery, at 3515B Edison Way, call 440-0084, or go to brushwith-science.com. ■



This "smart card," under development by Newdollar Enterprises, monitors all the components of the solar system, from panels to meter, and maximizes the yield of electricity from the whole system.