

At right, Cathy Jarl of Elgin, left, registers with Bluebonnet's Angela Robles at the Sept. 29 event, where participants met solar installers, heard a Solar 101 session and got goodie bags and breakfast tacos.



Wynn Wylkerson, below left, a Bluebonnet member for more than 40 years, says he's 'tickled pink' about the solar installation at his Manor home. He talks about his 7.6 kilowatt array with tour participants Shirley and David Perez of Maxwell.



Right, Wesley Brinkmeyer, Bluebonnet's manager of energy services, welcomes tour participants before the Solar 101 session led by D.J. Rosebaugh of Texas Solar Energy Society.



Below, Gabriella Villebrun, 8, of Dale, launches a solar-powered car she assembled at the kid-friendly event.

Photographs by Sarah Beal



Solar Tour shows off the power of the sun

Yes, the sun shined.

Dark clouds and rain threatened, but didn't dampen the day for more than 90 attendees at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's third annual solar tour on Sept. 29. The co-op hosted members and area residents at the new Lagos Elementary School in Manor. The Texas Solar Energy Society offered a detailed Solar 101 presentation, as well as an installer fair.



Watch a video about the Solar Tour at youtu.be/ACat6TrYONY

Kids had fun in the sun building and racing small solar-powered cars, courtesy of the nonprofit Solar Austin.

D.J. Rosebaugh of the Texas Solar Energy Society provided curious homeowners with a presentation on how home solar installations work, their costs, how effectively they reduce power bills and the best questions to ask installers.

Attendees asked lots of questions, wondering about the best location on a roof for solar panels, the varied costs and what return on their investment they can expect.

After the morning's events, which included breakfast tacos, coffee and goodie bags, attendees had the opportunity to take a self-guided tour of four area homes with roof-mounted solar panels. They talked with homeowners and installers about the costs, intricacies and effectiveness of solar arrays. Bluebonnet employees were on hand to answer questions about how homeowners' solar setups are connected to Bluebonnet's electric system.

One of the stops on the tour was the home of Wynn Wilkerson, who estimated he's been a Bluebonnet member for at least 40 years. "If you do the numbers of what it initially costs, what you were paying per month vs. now what you are paying, it's a no-brainer," Wilkerson said of installing a solar array.

Another homeowner said she believes her system will start to pay for itself within five years.

Bluebonnet has seen an uptick in solar installations, averaging about 27 per month. As of Oct. 1, the cooperative had connected 594 solar arrays onto its system, with a total production capacity of more than 6 megawatts of power.

To learn more about renewable energy, go to bluebonnet.coop, then click Energy Solutions and Home Renewables & Green Rates, or call member services at 800-842-7708. Get more information from the Texas Solar Energy Society's website, txses.org.