

THE BURGs business



Q&A with Bryan Walsh

The owner/operator of Solar Connexion says he has built a sustainable business by valuing reliability, efficiency, workmanship and integrity.

Bryan Walsh enjoys having a business and living with his family in the New River Valley.

—Photo courtesy of Solar Connexion

Bryan Walsh,

Owner/Operator

Age: 44

Family: Married, three children

Solar Connexion

Established: 1993

What they do:

Renewable energy contractor offering consultations, site analysis, design, installation and service of solar electric systems. The company is based in Blacksburg but has installed a vast range of residential and commercial renewable energy systems throughout the mid-Atlantic including off-grid, grid interactive and grid-tie solar energy systems. Visit their website at solarconnexion.com.

Mike Shaw

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Q How did you get into this business?

A It started as a childhood interest in energy when I was living in West Virginia. A neighbor one mountain over introduced me to solar energy and planted the seed. As a young adult, I was an apprentice electrician with my father and Steve Gerus at Bell Electric. I started installing photovoltaic panels as a side business, hence the original name of the business, Moonlight Solar, now Solar Connexion.

Q What is your favorite part of this job?

A I enjoy the physical installation of a system — long days on the job, wiring, working out details, problem solving, and then coming to that moment where you turn on one last breaker, and from that point forward, you know your customer is making their own energy. I will often hear back from customers after they receive their first electric bill and they are excited to see their charges are either greatly reduced or zero. A large part of my job is education and debunking myths about solar, and I build trusting relationships with my customers,

who often become friends.

Q In what ways does the company give back to the community?

A Solar Connexion works with community partners and has donated expertise and equipment to projects such as the Blacksburg Farmers Market, the Virginia Tech Lumenhaus, the demonstration wind and solar project at the YMCA at VT, and low-income housing organizations. We are making our portable solar trailer available to contribute power to the Summer Solstice Fest, Steppin' Out and similar community events.

Q What are your keys to success?

A We've built a sustainable business by valuing reliability, performance, efficiency, workmanship and integrity while minimizing the true cost per unit of energy.

Our staff is a small, highly skilled group whose entire focus is planning, building and providing service for high quality, state-of-the-art renewable energy installations for both residential and commercial applications. We contract the whole job and don't sub out anything, except digging in specific cases. We service what we sell and install, as well as service pre-existing systems, even if another contractor installed it.

Q What do you like best about having a business in the New River Valley?

A I've travelled across the state, been in many areas of the country, and visited a number of beautiful places, but there's nowhere I'd rather live than the New River Valley. Having my business here allows our family to live here. It's the perfect combination of rural tranquility and urban amenities.

Q What's your latest project?

A One of the more recent just-for-fun projects is the Solar Trailer, which is a self-contained portable solar electric system mounted on a 16-foot trailer. The idea actually came from Russell Chisholm of the Strange Coffee Company, who was looking for a way to power his coffee stand at music festivals where power was often lacking. We used surplus equipment and leftovers to build this system to meet his needs, using 6 x 175W solar panels, charge controllers, a small battery bank, and a 2800W inverter to produce AC power for his coffee roasting and brewing operation. We've found that the Solar Trailer has other potential uses, both practical and educational. Look for it at the Summer Solstice Fest, Steppin' Out and other area festivals.