

Sunny

**Solar power grows in popularity here,
but may not be right for everyone**

BY BILL KENT

with a chance of savings



Solar panels are installed at the home of Patrick and Laura Ellsworth in Ashburn Village.

It was Laura Ellsworth's idea. While working on her master's degree in sustainability from Harvard University, the Ashburn Village resident thought it might be a good idea to convert the sunshine that fell on her home into electricity.

Her husband, Patrick, ran the numbers, found an installer and, on a bright morning last August, the couple turned on the solar panels for the first time. They quickly saw the kilowatts they drew from Dominion Energy drop to zero.

What does that mean? It means the panels on their home's roof were providing enough power to light the lights, air condition every room, run all the appliances, power their technology and gadgets and even recharge their two hybrid automobiles.

"I'm sure we'll have days when our usage goes higher," Patrick Ellsworth said. "We'll go through periods when there's a thick cloud cover that would reduce what the panels produce, but our electric bill has gone so far down that we've had weeks when the [extra] electricity we make... went back into the [local] power grid."

And if the Ellsworths' panels generate more power than the couple uses, Dominion will actually pay them for the excess power they send back to the grid. When the couple includes their savings from government solar tax credits and exemptions, they expect the cost of their solar installation will be paid off in seven years – possibly less.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

The Ellsworths are among many Ashburn homeowners who have gone solar in recent years. The Brambleton community alone reports more than 100 solar installations in the past two years.

Among them are Mike and Jessamyn Turicchi, who went solar in November.

"We've seen the writing on the wall," Turicchi said. "Energy prices keep going up, and the solar-generating technology has improved to the point that it's affordable. Add the tax credits and it's hard to say no."



Last August, the U.S. Congress raised the Federal Solar Tax Credit to 30% of the cost of installing a residential solar power system. The cost includes contractor fees, necessary structural repairs or upgrades, permitting and the financing of a loan if needed. Congress also extended the time that a homeowner can take advantage of the credit to 2032.

That means if the full bill for installing a solar power system is \$30,000, homeowners can deduct as much as \$9,000 from their income tax. The state of Virginia offers benefits for going solar as well.

For the Turicchis, their 40-panel array has cut their electric bill by about 65%. They expect to have the system pay for itself in about 10 years.

"We were hoping for 80%, and we still may get it, but we're happy with the results," Mike Turicchi said.

GROWING TREND

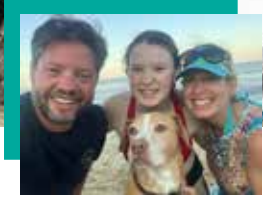
Right now, the price range for an Ashburn residential solar power installation is about that of a moderately priced car – from \$20,000 to \$60,000. That's according to BrightSuite, a division of Dominion Energy that sells and installs solar equipment in some parts of Virginia.

Timothy and Sharon Giebel came in significantly below that for a 10-panel installation on their Ashburn Village townhome.

"We face south and get sun all the ☺"



An aerial view of the solar panels atop the Turicchi family's home in Brambleton.



THE TURICCHI FAMILY

time. When we ran the numbers, it made perfect sense," Tim Giebel said.

Rick Thrutchley owns RNR Energy Solutions, a Leesburg company that installs solar panels. He said there has definitely been an increased interest in going solar. This is driven in part by the government tax credit, but also by the growth of the electric car market.

"The electric vehicle market and the solar market go hand in hand," Thrutchley said. "The interest in one generates interest in the other. If you have an electric vehicle and solar, you can eliminate two bills – your gas bill and your power bill."

The trend isn't strictly residential.

Brambleton plans to add solar panels this year to a new maintenance building. Last year Ashburn Farm put up solar panels on its Windmill Drive community center and Breezy Hill recreation building. At the Windmill Drive center, nearly every section of the building's roof is covered with large, dark photovoltaic rectangles. Installed in two phases from May through September, the system is expected to save the community at least \$15,000 a year.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

While the advantages of solar power can be appealing, it is not for everyone. In some locations, tall trees and nearby structures

can put a home in shade for most of the day.

Among other factors to consider are the direction a house's roof faces. South is best; east or west are good; north may be problematic. Then there's the size and kind of roof. The more panels that can fit on a roof, the more electricity they can generate. A broad, gable-type roof free of dormers, skylights and utility vents is ideal.

And there's the condition of a roof. Adding solar panels will complicate any repairs a roof may require. Some roofing materials will support the added weight of the panels better than others. So, a new roof may be necessary before the panels go up.

Finally, there is the cost. Most of the roughly half-dozen solar installers currently working in Ashburn will help homeowners qualify for a loan to pay for the panels, the permitting, any physical upgrades to their roof and the added technology their home will need to manage the system.

With federal, state and local tax credits, as well as a reduction in electric bills, the cost for the upgrade should be at or below what a homeowner currently pays for electricity so that the system will pay for itself in seven to 10 years.

WORDS OF CAUTION

Unfortunately, not everyone will qualify to go solar at their home, even if they really want to. RNR Energy's Thrutchley says solar companies follow a formula of sorts to determine whether a potential client will benefit. In many cases, perhaps the majority, solar isn't right for the homeowner. The factors mentioned above can actually mean going solar will cost more rather than less. →

Jimminy Cricket!

INTERNATIONAL

SPORT IS TAKING

OFF IN ASHBURN

BY PAUL ANTHONY ARCO

PHOTOS BY ASTRI WEE

Ashburn resident Sumit Daryani grew up loving the sport of cricket. He was 10 when he first took the “pitch” in his native Dubai, in the United Arab Emir-

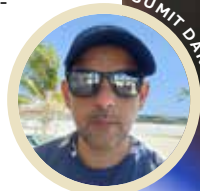
ates. He eventually played for his high school team as a right arm fast bowler, and his passion only intensified. He idolized Kapil Dev, a cricket legend who helped India to its first World Cup in 1983.

“I like the entertainment of the sport,” said Daryani, who now lives in the Village of Waxpool neighborhood. “It can get suspenseful – you often don’t know who’s going to win until the last minute.”

If that’s the case, then there must be a lot of suspense in Ashburn and wider Loudoun County. Cricket is booming here. According to Loudoun officials, the county-sponsored cricket league had 60 teams this spring and some 1,800 players. And that’s just the adults. Youth cricket is growing, too.

The interest and demand has been so high that Loudoun’s new Hal & Berni Hanson Regional Park near Ashburn includes the county’s first dedicated cricket pitch.

Daryani moved to the United States in 2001 to further his education. Over the years, he played recreational cricket across two countries, but his work as the director of software engineering for Capital One



SUMIT DARYANI



ARAV DARYANI



KAUSHAL KANSARA

keeps him busy, so he’s on a break for now.

Instead, Daryani spends much of his free time coaching his 11-year-old son, Arav, a left-handed pace bowler, who has followed in his footsteps. (A fast bowler or pace bowler refers to a style of play in cricket focused on the speed at which the ball is thrown. The other main style is a spin bowler, who puts spin on the ball.)

“He took to the sport and learned very quickly – bowling came naturally to him,” Daryani said. “He’s much better than me at that age and he’s learned a lot through his training. But the best part is cricket has become a way for me to bond with my son.”

WIDE WORLD OF CRICKET

Cricket is one of the oldest and most popular sports in the world, behind only soccer. It apparently originated in southeast England as early as the late 1500s. Besides England, the sport is especially huge in former British colonies, such as India and

Australia. It’s growing quickly in other parts of the world, including the West Indies, the Netherlands and Zimbabwe.

A large portion of Ashburn residents have moved here from many of those countries, along with India, Pakistan and Bangladesh – and brought with them that same passion for cricket. According to the latest census estimates, roughly one in five Ashburn residents is of Asian heritage.

Thanks to community support, Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) started an adult cricket league in 2009 with seven teams that played on a temporary cricket pitch at Mickie Gordon Memorial Park in Middleburg.

Modifications were then made to fields at Philip A. Bolen Park in Leesburg to accommodate cricket by adding temporary pitches and later permanent pitches on shared-use fields. In 2016, PRCS built two cricket fields that were shared with youth soccer on the weekends for games. In 2016, the baseball field at Mickie Gordon Memorial Park was redesigned to become a permanent cricket pitch with lights and a concrete base.

When planning began for the Hanson Regional Park, which opened in fall 2022, county officials included a field specifically designed as a cricket pitch. The pitch at Hanson is the size of 2½ soccer fields and sits in the far corner of the park, next to a pavilion and surrounded by soccer fields.

“The parks system has done a fantastic job of recreating that passion for people who are from different countries where cricket is huge,” said local player Kaushal Kansara.

Terry Ellis, youth sports coordinator for PRCS, who previously served as adult sports coordinator, said when he inherited the program there were 12 teams and

(Left) A batter from the Fafda 11 cricket team swings at a ball during a cricket match at Bolen Memorial Park in Leesburg. (Above) Kaushal Kansara from the Reston Rockies jumps as a ball is pitched, or “bowled,” during a cricket match at Hanson Regional Park near Ashburn. (Right) An aerial view of Hanson Regional Park and the round cricket pitch in the center of the photo -- at the back corner of the park.



PHOTO: LOUDOUN PRCS

TERRY ELLIS



now there are 1,800 players on those 60 teams.

“The growth is unreal,” Ellis added. “Over the years, the demand for fields continues to get bigger and bigger.”

Ellis says players come from as far as Maryland, and the county has plans for additional fields.

The Loudoun County Cricket League consists of two seasons – a spring season from March to July and a fall league from July to October. The leagues run on weekends, and tournaments are held during the week. A tournament includes round robin play, playoffs and a championship. PRCS is looking at adding tournaments for participants age 40 and over.

LIKE A RELIGION

Cricket is a family event. During championship matches, the pitch is lined with adoring fans, including wives, children and even grandparents.

“Like any major sport, many of these

guys grew up playing cricket and they developed a love and a passion for the sport,” Ellis said. “When you have that passion, you want to play and play and play. Some of these guys would play all day if they could.”

That includes Kansara, who started playing cricket at age 5, when he lived in his native India, where cricket is king. “It’s really big,” said the Leesburg resident. “It’s almost like a religion.”

A structural engineer who runs his own firm, Kansara moved to the United States in the early 2000s, when he enrolled in Virginia Tech to earn a master’s degree. His first glimpse of cricket in this country came when he played recreational cricket on the basketball courts at Virginia Tech.

Kansara says the excitement for cricket is comparable to that of football. “I’ve been to football games at Lane Stadium at Virginia Tech, where the fans are rowdy and you can feel the vibration from your seat,” he said. “It’s the same with cricket. It gets crazy.”

Although he enjoys the competition, Kansara appreciates the sport for its deco-

rum. “It’s called a gentleman’s game,” he said. “There’s no room for cursing at each other or at the umpires – no matter the call or decision. There’s respect for everyone. Any time we teach the kids about cricket, the first lesson is always about the spirit of cricket, which is to respect everyone. You never argue with anyone. You keep it to yourself.”

START THEM YOUNG

Chita Nilak is the co-founder and head coach of Loudoun Cubs Cricket Academy, a premium academy that has trained more than 250 boys and girls since it opened five years ago, including many from Ashburn. The academy hosts national, state and regional tryouts, boot camps and high-performance individual and



Cricket 101

Cricket is played with two teams of 11 players each. Each team takes turns batting and playing the field. The batter is a batsman, and the

pitcher is a bowler. The bowler tries to knock down the bail of the wicket (pieces of wood on the top) and the batsman tries to prevent the

ball from hitting the wicket. Two batsmen are on the pitch at the same time. The batters can run after the ball is hit – but they don’t

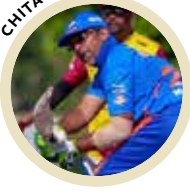
have to. A run is scored each time they change places on the pitch. The team with the most runs wins. Each at-bat, called an “over,” comprises no more than six bowls per batsman. The

fielding team must retire or dismiss 10 batsmen to end the innings. Batsmen also are out when a hit ball is caught in the air or when the wicket is hit while they are running between them.



(Far left) Young fans watch a match between the Reston Rockies and Motabhai 11 cricket teams at Hanson Regional Park near Ashburn. (Left) A player from the Fafda 11 cricket team swings at a ball at Bolen Memorial Park.

CHITA NILAK



group lessons. Nilak said three other academies in Northern Virginia offer cricket training to more than 500 young people between the ages of 7-17.

Nilak has excelled both on the pitch and on the sidelines as a Cricket Australia certified national coach. He has not only coached his academy teams to regional and national championships but also coached the USA Cricket national women's team and the regional U19 girls' team to a national title in 2022.

"I used to take my kids to play baseball, softball and other traditional American sports, but then I thought, 'Why not cricket?'" Nilak said. "So, I would spend time with kids in my neighborhood, throwing the ball to them. We're using a bat and a ball, so basically, it's the same hand-eye coordination as baseball, field hockey or lacrosse for that matter."

Abhishek Shanbhag is a shining example of the Loudoun Cubs Cricket Academy's

training program. The Brambleton middle-schooler was introduced to cricket when he was 5. But he was also playing soccer, his first love at the time. Then, in 2020, Shanbhag moved from soccer to cricket once and for all and hasn't looked back.

And he's good. The 12-year-old is the captain of the academy team. He was named the top bowler of the National Youth Cricket League and top player in the Washington Youth Cricket League. He was also selected captain of the U13 Virginia 2022 team.

Shanbhag attributes his early success to hard work and a commitment from his coaches to help their players improve.

"I love it," said Shanbhag. "First, there is the sports aspect of it. It's fun and simple. You bowl the ball, hit the ball or try to catch or field the ball. The best part is the people, though. My coaches, teammates and officials help create a fun and loving environment." →



ABHISHEK SHANBHAG



A player sits with his bat and takes a break during a match between Fafda 11 and the VA Warriors cricket teams at Bolen Memorial Park.



Players from the Reston Rockies hug and pose for a team photo after a recent match against Motabhai 11 at Hanson Memorial Park. Motabhai 11 won by 34 runs.



GOING PRO

Nilak has even bigger plans for local cricket. He's in talks with Loudoun PRCS to bring a minor league cricket team to Loudoun someday. "We want to take our time and do it right, to make sure we have the community support," Nilak said.

In the meantime, fans across the country, including Ashburn, don't have to wait long to see the best cricket players in the world. Professional cricket has arrived, in the form of Major League Cricket, which is scheduled to begin play with a tournament in July in Texas. The Washington Freedom is among the six teams in the league.

"Cricket is a passion Indians have like basketball and football is here in the U.S.," said Sanjay Govil, a major investor of the league. "Everyone in India played cricket, and when they came to the U.S., they were looking for avenues to play, hence the popularity of the sport."

The Freedom are working with George



SANJAY GOVIL

Mason University to study the feasibility of a stadium that could host both MLC matches and George Mason baseball games.

And for the first time, the cricket World Cup is coming to the United States in 2024. Achin Patel can't wait.

Patel moved to the U.S. in 1997. Growing up in India, he played cricket every chance he had. During his career, Patel, who lives in Leesburg, has won several cricket championships and was glued to his TV when India won the World Cup in 1983. But the best thing about the sport, he says, is the camaraderie among participants.



ACHIN PATEL

"I like to bring people together as a team," Patel said. "Even when we're not playing, our team will meet for a social outing, just to spend the day together. We're more than friends – we're family." **A**

Paul Anthony Arco is a longtime journalist and freelance writer who has written articles for publications around the United States.

AS THE WORM TURNS

LOCAL BUSINESS BRINGS COMPOSTING TO YOUR DOORSTEP

BY JILL DEVINE

A year ago, a friend told Katie Eibner about a local service that offers customers a five-gallon bucket of “gold” in exchange for a year’s worth of kitchen scraps. That seemed like a great deal, so the Belmont Greene mother of three signed up right away.

Now Eibner is deciding what to do with her bounty, which was delivered to her door by a Loudoun-based company called Worm Works LLC.

“My husband wants to save it for his favorite trees in our backyard,” she said. That’s because Eibner’s industrial-sized bucket was filled with something farmers and gardeners call black gold, a natural, nutrient-rich soil additive

that turbocharges plant growth, thanks to a powerful component: worm castings, or – perhaps more simply – worm poop.

CURBSIDE COMPOSTING

Eibner pays Worm Works, the only service of its kind in Loudoun County, a small monthly fee to pick up her family’s food waste. The scraps are then added to those from other subscribers and delivered to a farm in Middleburg for vermicomposting, a



Clients put food scraps into a Worm Works food waste bucket and later receive a bag of nutrient-rich compost to use in their gardens or yards.

controlled process that uses worms to break down biodegradable material.

Eibner keeps a can near the kitchen sink to gather scraps like apple cores and coffee grinds, and at the end of the day she dumps it into a larger bin on the back deck. Worm Works picks up that bin and leaves a clean one every other week.

“I’ll probably bump up to weekly service soon,” Eibner said. Rates range from \$15 a month for a once-a-month curbside collection to \$35 a month for weekly collections.

The yearly bucket of black gold compost that Worm Works offers as a courtesy to curbside customers is a great perk, but that’s not what motivated Eibner.

“Composting brings an awareness of how much food you are buying and wasting,” she said. “The amount of waste that fills our bin is pretty shocking. Even with the monthly collection fee, I save money, because seeing all that waste motivates me to stop over-purchasing.”

CAN I COMPOST THIS?

FOOD

YES: Fruits and vegetables, including raw, cooked, spoiled, moldy or frozen food and peelings. Bakery and dry goods, including pasta, beans, rice, bread, flour, cereal, nuts and shells. Eggs and eggshells. Pet Food.



NO: Meat and fish, including bones and scales. Fats, oils and greases. Dairy products. Stickers on produce. Plastic produce bags.

PAPER

YES: Napkins, paper towels, tissues, paper egg cartons, paper grocery bags, cardboard toilet paper rolls, printer paper, parchment paper, certified-compostable plates, bowls and silverware.



NO: Magazines or wax-coated/shiny paper.

OTHER

YES: Coffee grounds, tea bags, houseplant trimmings, wooden popsicle sticks, chopsticks, toothpicks, hair and pet fur.



NO: Aluminum foil, staples, cigarettes, human or animal waste, cat litter, dryer lint.

Source: Worm Works LLC

Broadlands resident Trisha McKnight — a route driver for Worm Works — rinses out a collection bucket.



Belmont Greene resident Michelle Wendt is a co-owner of Worm Works. Here she is seen standing on top of a pile of composting material.



Katie Eibner, with her husband, Drew, and their children at the family’s Belmont Greene home.



Worm Works co-owners George Ardura (left) and Michelle Wendt (right) with Danelle Hayer (center) from Loudoun County's Department of Economic Development.

Food composting also protects the environment. According to a 2021 report by the Environmental Protection Agency, more than a third of the food produced in the United States ends up in landfills. Organic material rotting in landfills creates significant amounts of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. In the United States, more food is

sent to landfills than any other single material in everyday trash.

CO-OWNED BY ASHBURN RESIDENT

Eibner learned of Worm Works from her friend Michelle Wendt, who also lives in Belmont Greene. Wendt co-owns Worm Works with its 22-year-old founder, George Ardura, who lives in Sterling.

Ardura graduated from the University of Virginia this spring. He founded Worm Works while still a student and was a grant winner in the 2020 U.Va. Darden School of Business VentureLab summer incubator program. Worm Works incorporated in April 2020, and Ardura focused his fledgling business in Ashburn.

"It's centrally located, and so many peo-

ple in Ashburn were already aware of the benefits of composting," he said.

Ardura met Wendt when she applied to be a Worm Works route driver.

"I am passionate about eco-living and composting, so I was one of Worm Works early customers," she said. "Not everyone can or wants to bring composting into their own backyard. The piles grow quickly and can get pretty messy and stinky. Our service makes composting easy."

When Wendt's family moved to Ashburn 13 years ago, she left a career in aviation administration to stay home with her children. "My career took a hiatus, but in hindsight that led to this great opportunity with Worm Works," she said.

At first, Wendt borrowed her husband's truck for her route, which then was just 15 homes. Today, Worm Works serves more than 170 customers in Fairfax and Loudoun counties.

"I found myself thinking all the time about how to improve and grow this business," said Wendt, who compares composting to recycling glass, plastics and paper.

Some folks choose to do it and others don't. Recycling food scraps is just another way to repurpose waste and keep it out of landfills.

In 2022, Ardura asked Wendt to help with a presentation for the Loudoun Economic Development Authority's Innovation Challenge. The pitch was a success, and the business won a \$35,000 grant, which it used to buy a commercial van.

In December 2022, Ardura gave Wendt co-ownership of the company he founded.

"We are a social enterprise. Our main goal is to expand composting," Ardura said. "I could have held onto everything for myself, but Michelle is there every day, growing the business and greatly benefiting our mission."

Wendt predicts the company will continue to grow. "Once you know about composting, you can never unknow it. I will never be able to throw a banana peel in the trash for the rest of my life."

Wendt spends her off hours teaching about composting at local school and community events.

Broadlands resident Trisha McKnight is another Worm Works route driver.

McKnight lives in a townhouse so she can't compost in her yard. She says the compost Worm Works produces reminds her of the rich black soil of Illinois, where she grew up.

"I've been recycling since I was little – it's something my dad taught me. He could find a way to reuse everything," McKnight said. "Composting is so easy. There is no reason to keep adding to our landfills when we can instead turn food waste into something so beneficial."

Eibner hopes attitudes like this spread. To paraphrase an old saying, one person composting may seem like just a drop in the bucket — or the bin in this case — but it's those drops that make the bucket full.

"If even just one home in every 20 participated," she said, "the results would quickly add up to something meaningful." ■

Jill Devine is a freelance writer and former magazine editor from Loudoun County who writes for a variety of Virginia publications.

To learn more about composting and Worm Works, visit wormworkscomposting.com.