

Local business, Blue Skies Consulting LLC, goes green

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BELEN

One Belen business will soon provide enough energy not just for itself, but for its neighbors as well.

Blue Skies Consulting, LLC, which focuses on aerial photography, plans to install 50 solar panels from Schott Solar Inc. on the top of their hangar at the Belen Alexander Municipal Airport in October. And for that, they will receive a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development to offset the costs of installation.

Terry Brunner, USDA Rural Development state director, presented the grant award to Tammi Wiggins and Mike Racine, owners of Blue Skies Consulting on Friday.

"Blue Skies is an example of how small businesses in the county can use federal assistance to be more innovative, to hire more people and be more

successful in the long run," Brunner said.

The grant, provided through USDA Rural Development's Rural Energy for America Program, will provide Blue Skies with \$13,450 for the \$53,800 solar power system.

REAP aims to provide financial assistance to small businesses, ranches and farms in rural areas to help pay for the installation of alternative energy systems.

The program funded 20 projects around the state this year, which increased by four times from the previous year, said Ernie Watson, spokesperson for USDA Rural Development.

The solar energy generation system at Blue Skies Consulting will provide 143 percent of the hangar's electricity use, Wiggins said. The extra electricity will be sent back into the electric grid, which Blue Skies Consulting will be reimbursed for.

"Our average electric bill was over \$200, and now (the electric company)

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TERRY BRUNNER, USDA Rural Development state director, left, reads from the grant award plaque for Blue Skies Consulting, LLC in Belen. Tammi Wiggins, center, and Mike Racine, right, owners of Blue Skies Consulting, stand next to Brunner.

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will send us a check for \$150 a month or more," Racine said.

With the facility taking up 10,000-square feet at Belen's Alexander Municipal Airport, Wiggins said she and her husband, Racine, were searching for ways to reduce their carbon footprint.

"We use a lot of electricity," she said about the hangar, which includes a two story business building inside.

Aviation is also a fuel intensive business, Racine said, adding that last year the business used up 7,500 gallons of gas for their company's airplane.

The couple first placed solar panels on the roof of their home to "make sure it worked," Racine said, and it did.

"Thirty days later, our electric bill had a negative balance and then PNM sent us a check for \$70," he said.

The energy generation system is designed to charge an electric vehicle, which Wiggins and Racine are looking into purchasing to run errands for the company, Racine said.

The facility reuses fuel from airplanes and vehicles to heat the facility during the winter months and recycles reusable waste.

Wiggins said they may start looking into how to become a certified green business.