

Lafayette School District Goes Solar

By Andrea A. Firth

Lafayette School District will be creating some of its own energy, electrical energy that is, by the end of the year. The District will be installing solar panels on the rooftops of four of its five schools: Burton Valley, Springhill, and Lafayette Elementary Schools and Stanley Middle School. Lafayette's cost-saving solar venture was initiated through a grass-roots effort by parents and followed by over a year of investigative work evaluating solar energy providers.

The agreement established with the solar energy system contractor, Solar Monkey, will allow the provider access to the school rooftops and in return the School District will be able to purchase electricity at a cost that is less than their current PG&E electricity costs. The anticipated energy savings are estimated to be 10% to 30% of the District's current energy costs, which equates to approximately \$2.3 million over the life of the 25-year contract.

"The real savings come when

you own the equipment outright," notes Lafayette School Board President Stephenie Teichman. The District will have the option to purchase the solar panels at fair market value six years into the contract and at two-year intervals thereafter. According to Teichman, whether the District will be in the position to purchase the equipment or whether it will make economic sense will have be determined at that point in time.

The solar panels will be able to produce energy to cover about two thirds of the District's current electricity needs. "We are limited in the number of panels that we can have due to the shade at Happy Valley and some weight load restrictions at Stanley," notes Teichman. The project has also been kept to a scope that can be completed by the end of December 2008 when the federal tax credits that benefit the contractor are slated to expire. Both Moraga and Orinda Union School Districts are exploring the use of solar energy in their schools as well.