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**Kyle Davis**  
StoneCastle  
Mortgage Consultant/Partner  
Direct: 925-314-5299  
Fax: 925-831-9088  
Kyle@Stonecastle-LHF.com

### Green and Greener

## Less-power or Power-less?

**By Dave Rochlin and Katy Foreman**

**D**ave: Well it's mid summer, the time of year when many folks around Lamorinda are left shaking their heads in disgust when their PG&E bills arrive. If you decipher PG&E's complex rate structure, it gets pretty clear that they really want you to use less power. That big bill isn't profiteering-- it's a message. Building power plants and new transmission lines is expensive.

**Katy:** I think everyone benefits when we consume less power - especially the expensive peak power, which is what prompts utilities to build more power plants, something none of us want. Particularly coal ones! I'd rather see us meeting the state's clean energy requirements.

**Dave:** So PG&E has arranged it so that the more wasteful Kilowatts that you use are more costly....the last 200 Kwh you use in a month can actually cost 3 times as much as the first 200. This means that many of us can cut our electrical bill in half, just by cutting our power usage by 25%. It's almost like getting free car payments or free cell phone service, just for being aware of your energy use. Cell phone service...now there's profiteering.

**Katy:** Well according to Nielsen, the average teen sends 80 text messages a day...so that's another bill you can take control of.

**Dave:** Not likely.

**Katy:** Anyway, don't forget that reducing power use also helps the planet.

**Dave:** Of course! But whatever the motivation, we need to cut down on power.

**Katy:** Pools can be a killer on the power usage. A typical home pool uses about as much energy as it takes to power a home for three months (without a pool!). So it's important to look at how often you run the filter, use timers so they run off-peak, keep filters clean, and consider a solar solution for heating the water. Solar water heaters for pools can pay for themselves in five years or less.

**Dave:** As a former pool owner, I couldn't believe how much my bill went down by running the sweep less. Air conditioners can also push you into the higher rate tiers. Keeping the ducts and filter clean, using a programmable thermostat, and only cooling the house when you're home can help. Where we live, opening windows at night and closing them during the day can make a big difference as well. Finally, replacing incandescent light bulbs with CFLs saves on both lighting AND cooling bills, since most of the energy used by incandescent bulbs produces heat, not light.

... continued on page 14

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