

Millions in solar installations going in at area schools

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NORTH BAY — While the schoolchildren are away on summer break, solar energy system installers have been busy installing millions of dollars worth of equipment at school campuses around the North Bay.

For example, Sonoma Valley Unified School District this year is putting \$9.61 million of the \$40 million general obligation bond approved by voters last fall toward photovoltaic systems and related structures designed by Quattrocchi Kwok Architects of Santa Rosa. Graton-based solar installer One Sun is set to start this week at nine campuses, district offices and the bus barn and be completed by Aug. 15 before the 4,600 students in the district return. The project would feed a total of 2.1 megawatts to the electrical grid.

“We’ve hired 20 workers just for these projects,” said Bibi Leighner of One Sun.

The company is working on a total of 2.4 megawatts of systems at 14 school facilities for three districts in Sonoma and Napa counties this summer. Many of the projects involve installing panels on parking lot carports or shade structures over student gathering areas.

The Sonoma Valley district is tapping \$3.83 million in California Solar Initiative rebates, with \$750,000 generated in each of the first five years. The photovoltaic system was designed to offset 96 percent of the district’s annual electricity use, saving \$500,000 in district general funds the first year and \$26 million over 25 years.

The 1,000-student Twin Hills Union School District is putting a \$1.33 million new clean renewable energy bond approved in November toward a 325 kilowatt system One Sun is completing at Twin Hills and Apple Blossom schools.

Real Goods Solar is putting in systems for West Sonoma County Union High School District at the Analy, El Molino and Laguna campuses as part of a \$23.8 million in bonds voters approved in November. Part of those funds was going toward offsetting the district’s electricity use, which totalled 1.63 million kilowatts for all of 2010. Quattrocchi Kwok also designed those systems.

Piner-Olivet Union School District is spending \$2.4 million of its \$20 million bond on solar this summer. The project team includes Quattrocchi Kwok and Santa Clara-based general contractor Blach Construction, with which the district executed a lease-leaseback contract.

Napa Valley Unified School District continues to draw on bonds approved in the past several years and is installing solar arrays at its American Canyon and New Technology high schools. Quattrocchi Kwok designed the new American Canyon school and the New Tech expansion.

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