

People's Energy Fair- a dream

Richard Perez

After years of attending energy conferences populated by people who go home to public utility power, I think it's time for a change. Those of us living on our own power need to get together. During the last two years we have actually received over 20,000 letters from renewable energy producers and would be producers. We have seen, first hand, the enormous amounts of interest, energy and information within this group. We need to get together face to face, as many of us as possible in the same place and at the same time.

Spirit as Energy

Most energy conferences seem to concentrate on hardware. I guess this is natural considering that the attendees are paid by their companies to be there- and to sell something. I'm thinking that we need to concentrate, not on the hardware involved, but on the more intangible and important aspects of renewable energy. After all, most of us use the hardware in our daily lives and it presents little mystery to us. What we really have to share is our diverse information, opinions and experiences.

We need to get together so we can realize how many of us there are. If Home Power has shown us anything, it is that the use of renewable energy in small stand-alone systems is spreading like wildfire. Why? Well, many reasons- environmental, it's cheaper than the Power Company in rural situations, it offers freedom, and it's clean & safe.

We need to get together so we can become a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Our correspondence with HP readers has shown us that many of us have the same needs and are seeking and finding similar solution to similar problems. What we have failed to realize is the amount and quality of our information. While government and big business carry on megabucks research projects for the future of renewable energy, we are living on it today! And usually doing it on a budget that wouldn't buy paperclips for an "official" R&D project. Why wait for the energy establishment to implement the renewable technologies that our planet so desperately needs?

We need to get together because we are living in a World that needs our information and the spirit to make it work. Every oil spill, every nuclear disaster, every acid rainfall, makes what we are doing more critical. Most folks still think of renewable energy as a future source. We're living proof that it's the energy of today.

And we need to get together to meet, and share the joy of knowing each other. The outpouring of the finest of the human spirit has overwhelmed us at Home Power. We want to get everyone together so we can all share in the spirit of renewable energy.

So now what?

Well, for the above mentioned reasons, we need to get together. So let's do it. We at Home Power realize that this is a big project. To get maybe a thousand people together in the same place and time will require lots of energy, time, work and even some money. After doing some research, we realized that we could not do this by ourselves. In our initial discussions about this project, our summer intern, Chris Greacen had an interesting and challenging idea.

Let's organize this event in public via the magazine. Let's throw it open to everyone reading this. Are you interested? Would you come? Will you work on this project? What does the project need? Oh, just everything...

Decisions to make...

Organization? Does the fair require an organization? Our initial research indicates yes. The issues of liability insurance and legal responsibility seems to make a non-profit type organization the best bet to sponsor this event. Whether the organization will be an already existing one or a new one created specifically for the fair needs resolving. While several organizations (both biz type and nonprofit) have already expressed support, we still need to either form an official organization to handle the event or secure an existing organization as an official legal type sponsor.

What goes on?

I suggest a live in type situation. This will give folks time to share all that will be happening. How about discussion groups based around the different renewable technologies? How about organizing to encourage the local utilities to develop renewable sources? How about cooking meals in solar cookers? How about technical discussions complete with working examples? How about a communications network so fair goers can communicate worldwide using free radio sources and sunlight for power? How about practicing what we preach and running the fair-everything from energy input to waste- as a model of the best ideas we are now using. How about the latest hardware, not only on display, but actually working on site doing necessary jobs for fair goers? How about meeting old friends you never knew you had? How about your ideas?

Where?

This is a good question. With people coming nationwide, it's bound to be a very long drive for someone. The location will greatly affect the cash necessary to pull this off. My personal inclination is toward a natural outdoor site, devoid of the "conveniences". Such a site would allow free or low cost camping for between several hundred and a thousand people. Since we can bring our own energy via portable PV systems, the only real requirements are space, sunshine, water, and beauty. Should the site be public or private? Where should it be? What do you think? Do you know of the perfect site?

When?

I think the earliest date possible would be during the summer of 1990. It's going to take time to organize this fair, especially doing it with a nationwide committee of home power folks.

How Long

At least several days and maybe as long as a week or more. If we are going to get together from all over the country, we might as well make good use of our efforts. What do you think?

Jobs To Get Done

The following are jobs or job titles that have occurred to me. I'm sure that you can add to the list. And maybe even do one of the many things necessary to make this happen.

We at Home Power will do everything we can for this project. We don't have the horsepower to pull it off by ourselves. We are prepared to act as a clearing house for information and organization. Our phone, computers, people will handle things like mailings, publicity, database work, and keep a running record of progress in Home Power Magazine.

The HEAD CHEESE

This is a job and a half. Someone needs to ride herd on this entire process. A project like this needs one person to coordinate the activities of everyone working on it. This will be especially true if the fair is to be accomplished by a group spread out all over the country. I imagine that this job will become full time a month or two before the fair actually happens. Any volunteers? Someone who has organized a similar event in the past is needed.

Activities

Someone needs to work up a program of events. Here's a micro list of some discussion group subjects: Conservation, System Specification, RE Tax Credits, PVs, Solar Cooking, Batteries, Solar Hot Water, Water Pumping, Wind Machines, MicroHydro, System Controls, Wiring, Maintenance, Site Preparation, etc. The support I have canvassed from the industry to date tells me that we've no problem filling each group with knowledgeable hands-on people. Fun activities will also be scheduled. How about PV powered live music and entertainment? What kind of activities would you like?

Business Coordination

Many small business have expressed interest in attending. You know the folks, you probably bought your PVs from them. I favor allowing business to flow. If folks want to come and sell their wares, then it should be allowed. In any case, businesses would like to support this project, attend and display their hardware, information and services. The fair will need someone to coordinate and structure the participation of businesses in the event.

Communications

From the number of Hams reading Home Power, I'm sure that Amateur Radio will play a major part in the fair's communication systems. We've already dreamed up a complete PV powered Ham station that will allow fair goers to talk round the world. Ham radio can also handle local communications around the fair itself. We are trying to set up a radiotelephone link that would provide regular phone service at the fair for both voice and computers.

First-Aid

A first-aid station needs to be planned, housed and stocked. A doctor or nurse would be the best person for this task.

Food

I would encourage everyone to bring slightly more than they can eat, then there's some to share with others. Solar cooking should be the preferred mode. If combustion is used, let it have a renewable source- campfire. Should site-prepared food be sold? There is interest in setting up everything from juice stands to tacos.

Fund Raising & Financial

Someone needs to fill and keep an empty the fair's purse. Whether by charging businesses for space, charging fair goers for attending, donations solicited from who knows where, or any other legal manner, the fair needs to be funded. Someone with accounting and bookkeeping skills is needed here.

Legal

If the fair is to be an organization by itself, then this needs to be legally accomplished. Legal requirements like insurance must be dealt met. A lawyer is probably best suited for this job if we can find a pro bono RE person.

Clean-Up

A crew will have to be organized to clean-up afterwards. Hopefully, everyone will clean up after themselves, but being a realist I think a crew will be necessary. If a place can be found to accept such a delirious gathering, then we should at least leave it in better condition than when we arrived.

Security

Any gathering this size is going to need some gentle security. Someone needs to organize and implement this, along with forming some basic rules of conduct for the fair.

Transportation

The logistics of a fair in a remote location will place a heavy burden on transportation. Someone needs to corral and coordinate a herd of vehicles for this job. Equipment and supplies will need to be delivered to the fair and transportation will be needed inside the fair site itself. I vote for no motor vehicles within the actual fair area while the fair is going on.

Publicity

Home Power can do this. We plan on running a bi-monthly report on the fair's progress in the pages of each Home Power issue.

Health

Bathing facilities should be constructed using solar heated water. Fresh water should be pumped via PV power to many sites within the fair. Sanitary facilities must be provided. I know that this isn't the most glorious job, but it's an area where we can really teach the establishment something. Although plumbing and power systems are a lot of trouble to set up, I think that the fair should implement our best ideas for all to see.

Waste Recycling

All the fair's waste that can be recycled should be. Other waste needs to be disposed of in a healthful and responsible manner.

Now you tell me.

Can we do it? Do we need to do it? Do we want to do it? Are you interested? See any job that you could do? What to talk about it? If this fair is going to fly, then it will be from the work of renewable energy folks nationwide. Otherwise, it probably isn't worth doing...

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