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YEARS OF ORGANIZING CULMINATES WITH THIS MONTH'S INSTALLATION OF COMMUNITY-FUNDED SOLAR SYSTEM AT ISAAC DICKSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A moment six years in the making is coming this month as installation is underway on the much-anticipated solar electric system at Asheville's Isaac Dickson Elementary School.

In January 2015, Sundance Power Systems was awarded the contract for the project which lacked the funding from Buncombe County to complete with the initial school construction. Thanks to a fundraising campaign led by Sundance and the nonprofit Green Built Alliance's Appalachian Offsets program, the system was successfully funded by community donors.

Sundance has worked for the last 26 years to establish and promote renewable energy in the Western North Carolina region. Sundance strives to empower our communities through the adoption of renewable energy systems. Appalachian Offsets funds renewable-energy projects and energy-efficiency upgrades in Western North Carolina schools, nonprofits and low-income housing by pooling money contributed by local businesses and individuals through its voluntary carbon-offset program. This partnership has wielded success in developing the first truly community solar project in the region funded exclusively by local parents, teachers, concerned citizens, local philanthropists and the school system.

"It was critical to partner with Appalachian Offsets to fundraise for this project," said Dave Hollister, president of Sundance Power Systems. "The whole team at Green Built Alliance rallied to organize the crucial community fundraising for making this project happen."

Appalachian Offsets and Sundance finished fundraising for the school's project in late 2019.

"Over two years, more than 100 donors contributed directly to make this project happen," said Green Built Alliance Executive Director Sam Ruark-Eastes. "This was a collective effort and we couldn't have done it without the support of our donors who reached into their pockets to fund this effort. We are so grateful to live in a place that values clean energy for schools."

Isaac Dickson was designed by Legerton Architecture and Innovative Design as one of the state's first Net Zero Energy schools and has been awaiting the solar system to help it move toward manifesting that vision since it was built in 2015. Following the recent approval of the

long-awaited interconnection agreement from Duke Energy, the system will be installed over an 11-week period starting in early March, with completion expected in mid-May.

The school will receive a 300 kW photovoltaic array on several roofs with a total investment of \$428,000. Appalachian Offsets and Sundance coordinated the fundraising efforts, collecting \$305,000 through a variety of community contributions. The project is also being made possible through a \$75,000 rebate from Duke Energy as well as Asheville City Schools' allocation of \$48,000 in energy-efficiency rebates it received for the energy efficient construction of Isaac Dickson.

The solar array will be a net-metered system, resulting in the school's electric bill being lowered by more than \$30,000 per year with a 30-year savings of more than \$1.3 million, according to Sundance Power Systems. Through an agreement with Buncombe County, the money saved on Isaac Dickson's electric bills will go back into the school's operating budget.

"The Isaac Dickson project is an expression of the dedication and commitment of this community for taking action against climate change and to leverage this technology to benefit our school system for years to come," Hollister said. "With the leadership of the Green Built Alliance and its Appalachian Offsets program, teachers and concerned citizens were able to raise the money for the project. This is community solar at its best."

In addition to reducing the school's energy bills, Isaac Dickson will leverage the asset as a teaching resource by weaving student involvement in the installation process and data from the on-site solar system into curriculum for students.

"Installing a rooftop solar system will fulfill the architects' vision of using the school building itself as learning tool that can be used to facilitate discussions about our environment and conservation, as well as the impacts of fossil fuel consumption not just on our climate but also on our air and water quality," said Isaac Dickson parent Matt Menne, who played an integral role in fundraising efforts during his time as co-president of the school's PTO. "What better way to help than by reducing the carbon footprint of our schools, which provides the added benefit of saving money on energy costs for the district in the long run."

ABOUT GREEN BUILT ALLIANCE:

The administrator of the Appalachian Offsets program, Green Built Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a 20-year history of advancing sustainability in the built environment through community education, measurable standards and regional action. The membership-based nonprofit makes a difference locally and regionally through community programs including Appalachian Offsets, Green Built Homes, Blue Horizons Project, Energy Savers Network and the annual Green Building Directory magazine. Learn more or get involved at greenbuilt.org.

ABOUT SUNDANCE POWER SYSTEMS:

Sundance Power Systems is the original renewable energy company in the Asheville area, serving residential, commercial and institutional customers since 1995. Sundance sells, designs, installs and services solar power and radiant floor heating systems within a 2-hour radius of Asheville, including upstate South Carolina. Sundance is a family-owned, 'heart-centered' organization that is 100% local and committed to participating in the healing of the planet through renewable energy. Learn more and connect at sundancepower.com.