

Solar system lights up a park in San Miguel 'Mexico cannot afford to keep burning gas to make electricity'

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BY RICARDO CASTILLO

SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE – For decades city authorities have been haggling over the cost of keeping lovely Juárez Park lit up and safe for children to play at night.

The beginning of the end of that problem is at hand. The expat community has begun with the donation of a solar electrical system, which eventually will supply the park's full demand for public lighting.

The first installment of the solar power system went into operation over the weekend to commemorate spring's arrival as well as the opening of the Environmental Bicentennial Expo Fair at Juárez Park. Municipal mayor Lucy Nuñez publicly acknowledged the effort led by solar energy expert Ben Zion Ptashnik who did the installation of the silicon panels that are now lighting up part of the park. At the Environmental Expo Fair, some 25 small and large companies participated with ecology-friendly merchandising. Products ranged from organic produce and grains to led lights for street lighting. Even taco vendors showed efforts to clean the environment by serving their delicacies in traditional clay pottery and not plastic disposable plates, as is becoming customary nowadays. Also at the fair were expat representations such as the Rotary Club and Amigos of the Allende Dam, a water preservationist group.

The solar system installer at Parque Juárez explained to Mayor Nuñez the simplicity with which the system produces electricity from the sun and stores it in batteries for night use.

Ben Zion says this donation is a first of its kind in the country, and it will save the city a hefty amount of money. He hopes to place a second and larger system in the park "to make it self sustaining."

Ben Zion, a businessman, said that the gift was given mainly because at the time the municipal government "didn't have the money to do it" and pay for all of the equipment. Eventually, however, the government led by Nuñez will have to take financial responsibility but, as Ben Zion puts it,

“sometimes you have to prime the pump, you know, you have to put water in it to have water come out of the well; that’s what we are doing here.”

Ben Zion donated this first solar system, “the first in any park in Mexico” and this is an example what should be done all over the country.

“Mexico cannot afford to keep burning gas to make electricity,” Ben Zion states. “And unless Mexico switches to voltaic and wind energy to meet all its needs, it’s going to run out of gas.”

He hopes that the entire park will be fully working with solar energy “by next year.” In making this donation, Ptashnik makes it clear, he is not alone. “My customers donated the panels, both expats and Mexicans.”

Costs are still high to maintain the system but here’s where he hopes the municipality will come in as well as changing the existing high electricity-consuming yellow-glare light bulbs.

The system installed at Juárez Park, Ben Zion says, will last for at least the next 25 years.