

A solar new year for the Conservancy

By Nina Wu

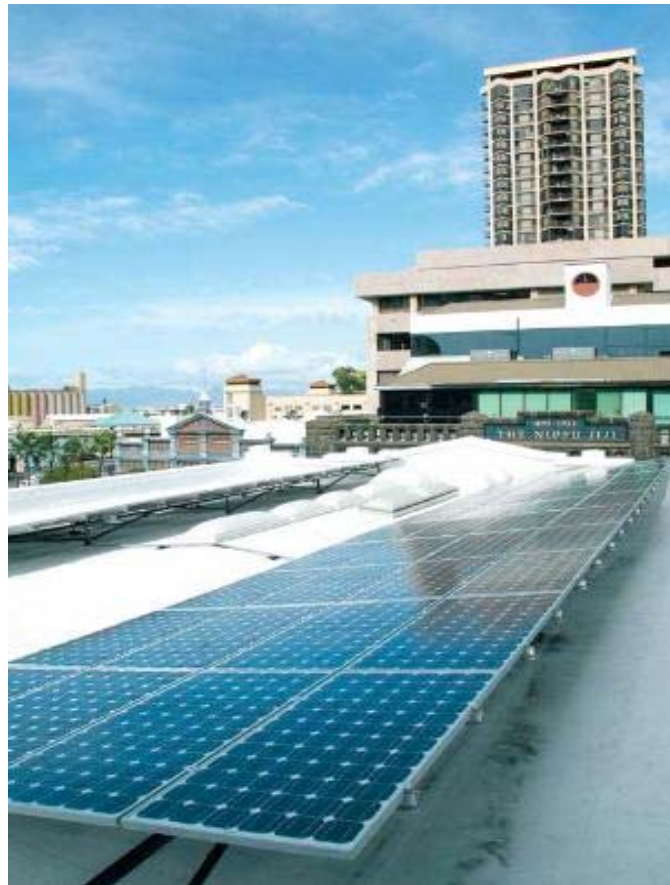
POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST,
Jan 09, 2009

The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii rang in the New Year equipped with a photovoltaic system on the rooftop of its downtown Honolulu office.

The 12.6-kilowatt system, made up of 72 panels, was installed in December. Combined with the building's new energy-efficient air conditioning system and light fixtures retrofitted with compact fluorescents, it is expected to reduce the Conservancy's overall energy consumption by more than 45 percent this year.

"We are thrilled that these panels are helping us to reduce our use of petroleum-based fuel," said Suzanne Case, the Conservancy's executive director. "With our conservation mission, it's imperative that we do our part and walk the talk."

Hawaii Energy Connection engineered and supervised the project in collaboration with **Siu's Electric**, the firm's commercial installation partner.



COURTESY NATURE CONSERVANCY

The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii installed a 12.6 kilowatt photovoltaic system on the rooftop of its downtown office in December.

The installation, which typically costs more than \$100,000, was made possible through a power purchase agreement in which the upfront costs were footed by a private investor, to be repaid over time by the Conservancy.

The nonprofit will purchase power generated by the solar project through monthly payments that should be lower than conventional utility rates. The investor, meanwhile, can benefit from state and federal tax credits.

Chris DeBone, project manager of **Hawaii Energy Connection**, the company that installed the system, said some creative problem solving made the project possible.

Typically, smaller systems don't qualify for a purchase power agreement, he said, since investors are interested in large-scale projects, which start in the millions.

"Now we have a new business model that can be used to help other small nonprofits find their own solutions and obtain their own PV systems," he said.

Purchase power agreements have also become popular for larger-scale commercial projects, such as the system installed last year on **Sam's Club** on Keeaumoku Street. In October, Punahou School installed a 460-kilowatt photovoltaic system through a similar agreement.

The Conservancy made a commitment to green all aspects of its operations in 2006 after taking stock of its carbon emissions.

The historical Wing Wo Tai Building - originally built in 1877 and rebuilt in 1916 - is also on track to become the first existing building in Hawaii to qualify for LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification.

Though extra permitting was required, Case said it is an example of how cutting-edge technology can be integrated with a historical building's design.

Later this year, the Conservancy also plans to outfit its Molokai office with a similar system that could fully power the building there.

"We are just doing what we can to tackle the global climate problem on a local level," Case said. "By taking steps to shrink our own carbon footprint, we can be part of the solution."