

SAE School Set to Become First 100% Solar-Powered School in Georgia

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ATLANTA, GA—September 2, 2020— Southface Institute announced today the completion of solar installation work for its partnership with The SAE School and a groundbreaking philanthropic financing structure that opens the door to solar for other schools and nonprofits. The ribbon-cutting event to unveil the project, a cornerstone of the school's net-zero goals, was held Wednesday, September 2, at The SAE School, 6688 Mableton Parkway SE, Mableton, GA 30126.

The SAE School's Unique Mission

In its eighth year of operation, The SAE School, which takes its name from a focus on science, art and entrepreneurship, is home to 200 students, preschool through eighth grade. School founders have made a strategic effort to keep tuition low, about half the cost of most metro private schools, allowing them to host a diverse school community, with an 85% minority student body. Keeping expenses and margins at a minimum, The SAE School has looked for innovative measures to reduce costs since its inception. Its net-zero plans and 100% solar goals are an outcome of not just a desire to save resources, but the school's commitment to teach its students about the importance of resiliency by example.



Installation of The SAE School's solar array in August. Photo by Sarah O'Connell, Creative Solar USA

"The partnership and guidance our school has received from Southface has been priceless. They have guided us over the last couple of years and allowed us the opportunity to be the first school in Georgia to be 100% solar," said Scott Starowicz, CFO of The SAE School. "The reality for our school is this project is the icing on the cake that will fulfill all of our sustainability goals. We want to be a shining example and advocate for other nonprofit

organizations of how this can be done. We look forward to our continued partnership and the opportunity to help others in our community."

For Southface, the project is an important milestone in helping nonprofit partners, like schools, achieve their net-zero goals with a financing structure they plan to help replicate elsewhere.

"Southface is so proud to be a part of this achievement for The SAE School in its efforts to become a net-zero facility, said Andrea Pinabell, President of Southface Institute. "We applaud their foresight and determination in making solar a key part of their sustainability strategy and are thankful to our financing partners in creating this innovative model that can help other schools and nonprofits achieve similar goals."

"Getting to net-zero can feel unattainable to schools. This partnership is an amazing example of how it is attainable," said Gretchen Gigley, Program Manager of Nonprofit Solutions for Southface Institute. "The SAE School began by implementing energy efficiency and indoor air quality improvements through an early GoodUse grant. Now through innovation, vision and partnership, they have crossed the net-zero finish line with a complete 30 kW solar array. It's an inspiring example of collaboration and commitment to a healthier and more sustainable school community."

Funding Offers Roadmap for Other Nonprofits

The SAE School was able to reach its goal of 100% clean energy years ahead of schedule due in part to an innovative, philanthropic financing structure. While similar structures have been used for commercial projects, this is the first of its kind in Georgia to leverage both tax equity and charitable grants and is a model for other nonprofits pursuing similar goals.

The basis for the structure leverages legislation that provides for Solar Energy Procurement Agreements (SEPA's) and federal tax credits that help promote solar energy. In order to take advantage of these components, an entity was established to fund the solar project through the backing of a broad group of supporters that includes Southface's GoodUse program, The Bill and Melinda Nussey Foundation, Allen Bradley of Trusted Counsel and Monarch Private Capital. A SEPA was put in place between the entity and The SAE School. The SEPA provides for the sale of electricity generated through the solar project to The SAE School at a rate that allows a savings of approximately \$15,000 a year in utility costs. After approximately 10 years, the school will have the option to purchase the solar infrastructure and therefore almost eliminate their cost of electricity for the remaining life of the project.

"Financing is often the biggest barrier to small commercial solar projects like this one," said Allen Bradley, a partner with the law firm Trusted Counsel. "Philanthropic SEPA financing provides an exciting opportunity for nonprofit organizations to reap the benefits of solar power. And for environmentally focused donors, their giving is doubly impactful. This funding model makes community nonprofits more financially sustainable while reducing our dependence on nonrenewable energy. That's a win for everyone."

The solar project was designed and installed by long-time Southface partner Creative Solar USA.

"The team at Creative Solar USA is proud to play a role in this important project, which will not only provide cost-effective solar energy to the school but also serve as a learning tool for the students and community," said Creative Solar USA CEO Russell Seifert. "I founded Creative Solar USA to be a pioneer in our changing energy industry, and this initiative is a strong illustration of our dedication to clean, economical, energy for our fellow Georgians and future generations."

About SAE School

[The SAE School](#) is a science, art, and entrepreneurship-focused school that teaches students preschool to 8th grade through a project-based learning methodology.

About Trusted Counsel

[Trusted Counsel \(Ashley\) LLC](#) is the source for substantive, confidential assistance in business law, and its clean energy practice involves both negotiating principal agreements and assisting with development of the finance structure for solar energy projects. Trusted Counsel is a corporate and intellectual property law firm dedicated to serving the unique needs of companies, investors and legal departments. Our focus is to guide and empower you with exceptional legal counsel, knowledge and tools that lead to practical, informed business decisions. Learn why Trusted Counsel may be the right partner for your business at

About The Bill & Melinda Nussey Foundation

The Nusseys believe that affordable, reliable and clean electricity should be available to every community and home in the world. It is an essential service that enhances health, safety, education and community resilience, all while protecting the planet for future generations. The Nusseys have worked across Africa, Puerto Rico and the U.S. to bring the promise of distributed, local energy to communities that might otherwise be unable to afford it.

About Monarch Private Capital

[Monarch Private Capital](#) manages ESG funds that positively impact communities by creating clean power, jobs, and homes. The funds provide predictable returns through the generation of federal and state tax credits. The Company offers innovative tax credit equity investments for affordable housing, historic rehabilitations, renewable energy, film, and other qualified projects. Monarch Private Capital has long-term relationships with institutional and individual investors, developers, and lenders that participate in these types of federal and state programs. Headquartered in Atlanta, Monarch has offices and tax credit professionals located throughout the U.S.

About Creative Solar USA

[Creative Solar USA](#) is the largest Georgia-based, turn-key installer of innovative solar panels and energy storage systems for homes and businesses.

About Southface Institute

Southface Institute, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, is leading the way toward a sustainable, equitable and healthy built environment for all. Since 1978, our programs have closed the gap between environmental awareness and action by promoting scalable resource efficiency and clean energy solutions for homes, workplaces and communities. Our practice of regenerative placemaking amplifies real-world strategies to create a built environment where the synergy between ecological and human needs supports health and well-being while creating resilient, equitable and thriving communities, striving to achieve a low-carbon future.

For more information, please contact Emily Proctor, Senior Communications Manager, Southface Institute, at eproctor@southface.org.

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