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***Two Lower-Income Northern Virginia Families Benefit from Solar Energy
On Two New Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia Houses***

Note: Photos available below.

ALEXANDRIA, VA, May 12, 2016 – Two local, lower-income families will now experience the benefits of solar energy. Today, a team of volunteers joined non-profit GRID Alternatives Mid Atlantic to install 16 solar panels – eight per house – on the roofs of two energy-efficient homes Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia (Habitat NOVA) is constructing in the Groveton Heights neighborhood of Fairfax County.

The two single-family, three bed, two bath homes will be the first of Habitat NOVA's to feature solar panels, and the site of GRID's first solar installations in Virginia. Each home will have eight solar panels producing 2.16 KW of power. Habitat NOVA plans to install solar panels on five townhomes it will begin constructing in the City of Alexandria in the next year.

"Lower-income households pay a disproportionate amount of their income to utility and energy bills as compared to other homeowners across the country, spending between 17 and 50 percent of their incomes on energy while other households average just four percent," said Jon Smoot, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia. "Putting solar panels on the two houses Habitat NOVA is constructing is not only good for the environment, it's good for the family budget. Long-term affordability means the families can be successful homeowners for years to come."

Habitat NOVA volunteers, along with the future homeowners, are constructing the two homes to EarthCraft Gold standards, making them energy-efficient while maintaining long-term affordability. All EarthCraft certified homes demonstrate energy costs that are, on average, 30% below those of a typical new home, directly translating to monthly utility savings while lessening the impact on the environment. The homes have also been designed to meet Easy Living standards with a step-free entrance from the driveway or sidewalk into the central living area on the first floor. The first floor includes one bedroom and a full bath, making it a home equipped for aging in place.

The homeowners are required to put in hundreds of hours of "sweat equity" as part of Habitat's unique building and mortgage-lending model that helps qualified, lower-income first time homebuyers purchase a home with just 1% down and a no-interest loan. With a conventional mortgage loan, they may otherwise not be able to afford the home.

"We are excited to partner with Habitat NOVA to put solar on these homes and save families money they can use for other basic expenses like food, healthcare and transportation," said Nicole Steele, Executive Director of GRID Alternatives. "Together, our organizations are working to ensure that everyone has access to the benefits of clean energy."

According to GRID Alternatives, 36 tons of greenhouse gas emissions should be off-set per home over the 25-year system lifetime – the equivalent to planting 850 trees.

Construction began on the two houses in December 2014 and are expected to be completed by early Fall 2016. The homes were designed by Sanchez Palmer Architects & Triad Engineering, pro bono.

Photos to follow. For original images and b-roll, contact Robin Pence at Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia.



Volunteers with GRID Alternatives install solar panels on two homes Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia is building in Southeast Fairfax County. The two houses will be Habitat NOVA's first solar homes to receive solar panels and GRID's first solar installations in Virginia. (Photo credit: Mark Finkenstaedt for Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia).



Volunteers with GRID Alternatives install solar panels on two homes Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia is building in Southeast Fairfax County. The two houses will be Habitat NOVA's first solar homes to receive solar panels and GRID's first solar installations in Virginia. (Photo credit: Mark Finkenstaedt for Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia).



Jon Smoot, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia, and Leidy Perez-Davis, Outreach Coordinator for Congressman Don Beyer of Virginia, test the voltage output on solar panels volunteers with GRID Alternatives installed today on two homes Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia is building in Southeast Fairfax County. The two houses will be Habitat NOVA's first solar homes to receive solar panels and GRID's first solar installations in Virginia. (Photo credit: Mark Finkenstaedt for Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia).



Jon Smoot, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia, and Nicole Steele, Executive Director of GRID Alternatives, help raise solar panels to the roof of a new house Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia is building in Southeast Fairfax County. GRID Alternatives led the solar installation today – which marks the first Habitat NOVA homes to receive solar panels and GRID's first solar installations in Virginia. (Photo credit: Mark Finkenstaedt for Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia).

About Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia

Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia's (Habitat NOVA) unique model of affordable housing focuses on homeownership. Habitat NOVA homeowners secure a no-interest mortgage, while the non-profit secures corporate sponsorship, in-kind donations and volunteer labor to make the home affordable. Habitat NOVA was founded in 1990, and to date has built or rehabilitated 92 homes and repaired the exteriors of 29 homes, benefiting more than 400 people. As a local, self-sustaining affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, Habitat NOVA serves the counties of Fairfax and Arlington and the cities of Falls Church, Fairfax and Alexandria. Learn more at www.habitatnova.org.

About GRID Alternatives

GRID Alternatives is America's largest nonprofit solar installer bringing clean energy technology and job training to low-income families and underserved communities through a network of community partners, volunteers, and philanthropic supporters. GRID has installed 6,700 rooftop solar systems with a combined installed capacity of 23MW, saving \$181 million in lifetime electricity costs, preventing 444,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions, and providing over 26,000 people with solar training. GRID has eleven regional offices and affiliates serving California, Colorado, the Mid-Atlantic, the New York tri-state area, Tribal communities nationwide, and Nicaragua. For more information, visit www.gridalternatives.org.