

# RE People

**Who:** Ginny Wolff & Ray Minnerly

**Where:** Burlington, Washington

**When:** 2006

**What:** Grid-tied solar-electric system

**Why:** Environmental ethics

**Ray and Ginny in front of their grid-tied home in Washington.**



Ginny Wolff echoes the thoughts of many people who want to feel better about where their energy comes from: "I have been interested in switching to renewable energy ever since I realized that much of the electricity and heat that makes our lives convenient comes from fossil fuels and nuclear plants."

Ginny and her partner Ray Minnerly moved to Washington's Skagit Valley from Minnesota in the '90s. Ray is an electrical engineer at Fluke Networks. Ginny is a retired family physician who now spends her time gardening, playing music, and working as a social-political activist.

Both Ginny and Ray love spending time outdoors, whether it's tending their organic garden or watching wildlife from the bow of their 30-foot sailboat. Their first forays into solar and wind energy were installing small systems on their boat, which allowed them to comfortably live aboard for sixteen months. Seeing how easily the sun and wind provided energy for their boat's electric appliances helped them decide to buy a solar-electric (PV) system for their home.

To set the stage for the system installation, Ginny and Ray first made some changes to reduce their household energy use. These measures included turning down the thermostats for space and water heating, hanging clothes to dry on a clothesline instead of using the electric dryer, and switching to compact fluorescent lightbulbs instead of using incandescents.

**A shade-free rooftop on the garage provided a perfect place for the PV array.**



**The solar and wind-powered sailboat is Ray and Ginny's home away from home.**



Courtesy Ginny Wolff (2)

In September 2006, Dana Brandt of Eco-Tech in Bellingham, Washington, installed a 2.9-kilowatt PV system, using Sharp modules and a Xantrex batteryless grid-tie inverter. Ginny and Ray had decided that they could afford about \$25,000 for the system, which was designed to supply a large portion of their home's electricity. The PV array was installed on the garage roof—a highly visible location to neighbors and passersby—and the proud owners are happy to answer questions about it.

Ginny says, "We have to find a way for humans to live on this planet without destroying it, if there is going to be any hope for our kids. As a society, we need to make the political decision to support sustainable energy resources, instead of subsidizing the oil industry. We need transportation alternatives that aren't dependent on carbon dioxide-producing fossil fuels, and industrial technology that doesn't destroy the environment. Installing a PV system was a little place for us to start, with the hope that ideas will catch on and people will begin to change the ways they think about and use energy."

—Ian Woofenden