

SOLAR DEPOT



PETALUMA, CA-BASED COMPANY HAS BEEN IN THE SOLAR BUSINESS SINCE 1979

by John Ballard

SOLAR DEPOT WAS FOUNDED IN 1979 by husband and wife Anoosh and Kija Mizany, chemists who developed strong convictions in energy conservation and renewable energy after reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Solar Depot is a wholesale distributor and system integrator of solar electric and thermal systems with headquarters in Petaluma, CA and additional facilities in Sacramento and Corona, CA. The Mizanys were the sole owners until selling to ITOCHU International of New York in 2007. Anoosh Mizany is now in semi-retirement but serves on the board of directors and as a senior adviser. Kevin Shimokobe, a longtime ITOCHU management employee,

is the current CEO and oversees approximately 41 employees. According to Mizany, the sale to ITOCHU was completed because they shared the same basic philosophy and agreed to keep the Solar Depot team intact.

Over the past several years Solar Depot has grown at a 15–20 percent annual rate, and Mizany believes 2008 will be a good year despite the economic slump. Raw materials are more available now than they have been over the past few years when the industry outgrew the supply, creating a manufacturing bottleneck. Solar Depot currently works with over 100 manufacturers in the US and abroad

Above: Residence in Stockton, CA with a 10kW grid-tied PV system.



to ensure their customers are supplied with every component that a functional system requires. In addition, they provide a successful training program which is being expanded into other geographic areas as the interest in solar increases. "We have over the years trained upwards of 3,000 contractors, and a good number of them have become our customers," Mizany says.

With the raw material squeeze, over the last few years Solar Depot decided to focus on smaller residential systems, although they are gearing up for larger projects in 2008 as materials become more available. In the past they have designed and supplied systems for state and federal governments, NASA, universities, and municipalities, among others. Their largest project to date was a 520-kilowatt, three-acre ground mount system for a water treatment facility in Oroville, CA.

Mizany believes leveling the playing field with the fossil fuel and nuclear industries is key for the solar industry to thrive. "When you have oil, coal, and nuclear industries heavily subsidized by government, that's certainly going to affect the affordability of renewables," he says. Solar Depot also has to deal with the circumventing of some manufacturers who sell direct to contractors. "We basically have been

able to overcome that, but it's been through a lot of hard work and value-adding to the systems we offer."

According to Mizany, the glamour of the solar business draws in many new people without business or solar experience who spoil the business environment. "We're not going to be the cheapest guy on the block, but

we're going to provide good service and fair prices, and we're going to be around to take care of any warranty issues," he says. "Our plans are to grow, even at a better pace than we have in the past, partly because we have added resources with ITOCHU. We hope to grow and prosper and venture more into the larger commercial systems as well as the residential systems." GBQ

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Top: Frog's Leap Winery in Napa, CA with a 147kW commercial grid-tied system.

Bottom: Capitol Honda, San Jose, CA with a 152kW grid-tied PV system. The first car dealership in Northern California to receive a solar cash rebate through California's Self-Generation Incentive program. Opposite page: Solar Depot corporate headquarters, Petaluma, CA with a 12kW grid-tied PV system. Anoosh and Kija Mizany, founders of Solar Depot.

