Juice Up On Solar  
by Austin Prowse

Places in Central Texas are a hotspot for solar-derived energy. During Texas State’s No Impact Week—Sept. 25 through Oct. 2, 2010—a solar powered station for electronic devices was positioned outside the Roy F. Mitte building on the Texas State campus. The futuristic fuel station was strategically placed by Sol Design Lab, an Austin based non-profit that raises awareness of the photo-voltaics alternative. See http://www.soldesignlab.com/

The innovative design is from an actual 1950’s fuel pump and served as a utopia to those peddling 21st century electronics. It even offered students shade.

The station outside the Mitte building was collecting 35.5 volts, or 350 watts of direct current energy, which could power about 350 light bulbs, according to Nate England, a research associate in solar cell research at Texas State University. The energy collected gets stored into two batteries.

“I think this is definitely a good idea,” said Cean Longstreet, a studio art major. “You could correspond it to different buildings to personalize for different needs. Nobody wants to be sitting…. [enjoying] a nice sunny day and then, ‘shoot.’ I’ve got to go home and get charged.”

The solar station being proposed to the university by the honors and physics departments, as well as the environmental services committee would cost approximately $20,000, according to Dr. Heather Galloway, director of the University Honors Program. Dr. Bill Stapleton, assistant professor in the Ingram School of Engineering, said he could charge his wheelchair with the station, but chose not to because his batteries are roughly the same size as the ones collecting and would likely drain the whole experience.

“I’m looking to convince some students to look at this thing and say, ‘Hey this thing’s cool.’” “And we can put one in permanently,” said Stapleton with conviction.

Solar will be one of pioneering energies of the future, likely providing scholarships for ambitious students of science. And the sunny promise for a more eco-friendly future can already be seen in solar-power enthusiasts like Stapleton and England.