

# Kids Create Street Art That Generates Solar Power

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*(Photo: Land Art Generation Initiative)*

**A Pittsburgh project is designed to light up a disadvantaged neighborhood and show an alternative-energy future in a coal state.**

Kristine Wong

Pennsylvania's [coal industry](#) may be in [decline](#), but in one of Pittsburgh's toughest neighborhoods, a [solar](#) project could become a symbol of a brighter future.

Since August, Homewood residents have walked through the [Renaissance Gate](#)—a public art and solar installation built and designed by local youths during a six-week summer camp—and seen the Western Pennsylvania sun power their cell phones and light up the community center next door.

“The idea of a ‘Renaissance Gate’ is a passageway through which visitors can walk from the old Homewood into a Homewood of the future—a place of prosperity and opportunity for those who call it home,” said Elizabeth Monoian, cofounder of the Pittsburgh-based Land Art Generation Initiative. The group sponsored an [Art+Energy camp](#) designed to teach young people about the social, political, environmental, and aesthetic aspects of energy production.

The 17 red, yellow, and orange solar panels are mounted atop the gate in a configuration mimicking the symmetry of a flower. The installation can produce enough electricity to power the lighting at the [Homewood Renaissance Community Center](#) through a hookup to its electrical

meter. Two panels connected to a battery provide power for cell phone charging. The community center also receives a credit on its electricity bill by selling the energy that it doesn't use to the local utility.

The 20 students enrolled in the camp learned about Western Pennsylvania's deep roots in coal production and visited a local coal-fired power plant.

The Homewood Renaissance Association, which runs the community center, served as the link with the greater neighborhood community.

"All applauded the initiative to bringing solar energy to the neighborhood and loved that it was local kids leading the effort," said Robert Ferry, LAGI's other cofounder.

With only six weeks to complete the project, it was a race to the finish, according to Monoian, who said the team completed the detailed design drawings in the fourth week and sent them to a fabricator a week before the installation.

"We pulled it off, but it took some long nights and some good fortune," she said.

Ferry said he hopes the *Renaissance Gate* will be a catalyst for the area's transformation.

"Energy democracy is a critical issue that must be addressed in neighborhoods such as Homewood," he said. "Why aren't there more solar installations in neighborhoods that could benefit greatly from them? We hope that the impact goes beyond Homewood and Pittsburgh to ignite a conversation about both our visual landscape in all neighborhoods and in the usefulness of distributed energy systems for empowering historically disadvantaged communities."

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