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## Helping People with Fire from Heaven

Nine years ago nobody could imagine that a small organization like Solar Serve would receive a second prize in the 2009 Award for Creative Technology and Science. At that time people were laughing and looking down when Solar Serve introduced their first solar cookers. Their design was very simple, but it took hours of teaching in workshops to change peoples thinking and cooking habits. But finally they were successful and now people are using their solar cookers all over the country.



In 2000 Solar Serve started to work with the University of Technology in Danang. The first 10 solar cookers were given to people in Dien Phuc, a village near Hoi An. The cookers were well received and very soon Solar Serve had to supply more solar cookers to other villages. Although some people were able to pay for their cookers, many of them could not afford to buy them, so that the solar cookers were given away for free. The main purpose of Solar Serve was to help people, improve their life and help the environment.

After a survey they found out that people could save at least 100.000 to 200.000 dong of fuel costs if they cooked regularly with their solar cookers. But there were still some questions. Some did not want to use the cookers by saying that they could not cook when there was no sunshine. That was true, but it was not a good excuse. They needed to change their mind as people always have to do when new things are introduced.



One lady was struggling with this. Normally she cooked with electricity. She attended one of the workshops. During lunch time she went home in order to cook her lunch with her electric stove. That day there was no electricity. She was not discouraged but cooked her food with wood, in the way she always had done before. The next day she told others how limited her thinking was and was very happy with her new solar cooker and learned to change her mind and cooking habits.

During the workshops people were taught how to use the solar cookers and learned more about the benefits. Saving thousands of VN dong, improving their health, and protecting the environment were a few benefits. Cooking was very simple. After food was put into the cooker, people had to direct it towards the sun and left it till the food was cooked. There was no need to stir during cooking temperatures of 120 – 140 C. The box cooker was very good, but cooking could be more improved.



The big change came when Solar Serve introduced their new parabolic cooker in 2005. This new cooker was different than the box cooker because all the heat was concentrated at the center of the disc. The food could be cooked with temperatures of 250 C. Meat and fish could be fried and water be boiled in 20 – 30 minutes. People could also see and smell the food. Although it needed more attention, it was much faster. Therefore the parabolic cooker became very popular.

During those nine years solar cooking have been spreading. Almost 1675 families in Phan Rang, Quang Nam, Da Nang and Quang Tri have been provided with new solar cookers. The media got hold on it and published in 2005 a major article in Thanh Nien newspaper. The responds was overwhelming. Other articles appeared in Tuoi Tre, Tien Phong and other newspapers and after several VTV documentaries, many people got to know the solar cookers of Solar Serve.



Till that time Solar Serve worked as an organization, They were supported by individuals and organizations in and outside the country. After the parabolic cooker was introduced, many people wanted to buy one (1.500.000 VN dong for a parabol cooker and 700.000 dong for a box cooker). In order to do so Solar Serve decided to open a small enterprise in Tam Ky. Sadly, they had to close it down soon, after the landlord demanded the location back.



A real-estate introduced them to a piece of land nearby Marble Mountain. It was 21 meter width and 17.5 meter length enough for a Solar Serve center to be built. With support of many Solar Serve friends they were able to buy this piece of land and started to build at the end of 2007. After 7 months of hard work they were able to open the building a few days after the World Environment Day in June 2008. Now this beautiful center is used for preparing projects, building solar cookers, researching new ideas, selling solar cookers and giving information to visitors.

In the mean time Solar Serve supplied a village nearby their center with many solar cookers. It became a role model in solar cooking. The villagers of Hoa Quy ward have expressed their satisfaction with the solar cookers. On June 5<sup>th</sup> (World Environment Day) Solar Serve will organize special solar cooking demonstrations in this village. Everyone is welcome and learn more about the benefits of cooking with the sun. A few days earlier similar demonstrations will be given in Trieu Lang, a village in Quang Tri province.

After nine years of hard work, Solar Serve is beginning to see results. People are not anymore laughing and the demand for solar cookers has increased. With their project they were able to help many people and to protect the environment. Their example should inspire many young and old people to play their own part in helping others and saving this planet.



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