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"Let us rejoice, when the solar power comes and the lighthouse shines," sang the crowd at New Wine Christian Fellowship, adapting the lyrics of "Come, Let Us Sing," a traditional African-American hymn.

From the main section of the church, Neil Bernard, a senior pastor, led Granholm outdoors to a patio. Next to a playground, sat a new 440 kilowatt-hour battery, ready to store electrical power collected by the roof's new commercial-scale solar panels. The electricity created by the new 167.4 kWdc solar array and back-up battery will significantly cut the church's electricity bills.

New Wine's "lighthouse," part of an initiative called the Community Lighthouse Project, was constructed by union electricians and spearheaded by Together Louisiana, a network of more than 250 religious congregations and civic organizations across the state.

Eighteen months ago, Together New Orleans launched what they call "a network of solar- and battery-powered resilience hubs." The need for such a network had become grimly apparent several months before that, in the fall of 2021, when Hurricane Ida triggered prolonged grid failure, leaving much of the city of New Orleans without power for nine days. Parts of LaPlace were dark much longer.

More than two thirds of the storm's fatalities in the greater New Orleans area were attributed to power outages. All along the Gulf Coast, power outages have become a leading cause of death during severe storms.

Because risk and damage from storms, floods and infrastructure failures are tied to societal inequities, vulnerable populations in Louisiana experience more frequent and prolonged power outages, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

During Hurricane Ida, St. John Parish experienced the harshest flooding. Disaster crews rescued nearly 800 people from the 17 inches of rain and 5 feet of storm surge. Even then, before New Wine built its lighthouse, the church served as a shelter for residents and for the thousands of volunteers who came to LaPlace to help rebuild.

The new solar array will help defray electricity costs throughout the year. But now, the next time that the grid goes down, battery storage will restore power so that the resilience hub can assess resident needs for medical devices and other necessities and provide aid to residents. The stored electricity will be used to provide cooling and heating stations, charging stations, oxygen exchange, light medical equipment and other critical services.

Statewide, the Community Lighthouse in LaPlace is the seventh such resilience hub to become operational. It is by far the largest. To date, the six other operational lighthouses are in New Orleans, where the ultimate goal



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is to build 86 locations, putting lighthouses within a 15-minute walk from any point in the city.

Already at this point, the Community Lighthouse Project is the nation's largest network of solar-powered resilience hubs. Together Louisiana is supporting the efforts to build resilience hubs throughout the state, with North Louisiana Interfaith planning a network of 20 across Caddo Parish and Together Baton Rouge planning six.

Together Louisiana leaders see it as an investment in clean, renewable energy and a way to build a better workforce, by helping local residents be trained in solar installation. The project is being financed by philanthropic and government funding, including \$250 million from the U.S. Department of Energy, to expand renewable energy resiliency and create over 350 microgrid hubs across the state. The Energy Department's investment requires an additional \$250 million in matching funds. In total, that's a \$500 million commitment to Community Lighthouse.

Though disaster planning is often conducted at broad levels - by federal, state and city officials - the lighthouse idea came from everyday people who identified a problem that needed to be solved, said Evelyn Turner, a leader with Together New Orleans. "Eighteen months ago, in the sweltering heat, we decided enough was enough and we needed to create a solution for our own communities. Today is a testament to that."

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