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SOLAR PANELS: *Lights go on and stay on*



Pays the bills: Architect John Rountree, right, shows a section of his solar panel in his home office in Westport. Mark Pizzi, above, of Westport, discusses solar power at the home of his business partner. Left, a painting hanging in Rountree's office shows the power of the sun.



Andrea A. Olson/Connecticut Post

Rebates available to defray high cost of installation

By ROB VARNON
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WESTPORT — The solar panels on John Rountree's home saved him from being plunged into darkness with the rest of his neighborhood during the August 2003 blackout, and now the pan-

els may be saving him from a looming rise in electricity rates.

Rountree, an architect, installed solar panels on his now-94-year-old farmhouse three years ago. He said the power didn't even flicker when the rest of the neighborhood, and much of the Midwest and Northeast, was hit by a

massive blackout on Aug. 14, 2003.

His system includes 12 solar panel modules on his roof and a direct current line running from the panels into a converter in his office, where electricity is distributed to the rest of the house. The system also includes 12 batteries that store electricity in case of

an emergency.

"Generally, you don't turn on all the lights," Rountree said of the night of the blackout. "But I did."

He said when a solar power system is operating on batteries, the idea is to

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