

Pair looks to spread the word on solar power savings

Continued from E1

conserve that power by using as little as possible. But on that night, he wanted his lights to reach out into the dark and serve as a symbol of the viability of solar power.

Now, Rountree and fellow Westport resident Mark Pizzi, a business consultant and entrepreneur, are reaching out to the community to try to encourage more people to install solar energy systems.

The pair received a U.S. Department of Energy grant for \$10,000 and a matching grant from the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund to set up seminars on how solar energy works. They are planning to hold a series of talks in the region next year about the benefits of installing a solar power system.

Their seminars might attract more attention in the face of a rate increase requested by Connecticut Light & Power Co. that could drive up user bills by 16.7 percent in 2005.

CL&P has filed a petition

with the Department of Public Utility Control to raise rates on its 1.1 million customers to cover the rising costs of electricity generation. CL&P said that higher prices for fuel, like oil and natural gas, has forced generators, from whom CL&P buys electricity, to raise prices. CL&P contends it has to recover those costs from its customers. New federal regulations are also forcing prices up in the state due to inadequate transmission lines in southwest Connecticut.

Those regulations require people who live in areas where electricity cannot be transmitted efficiently to pay more for electricity.

"Fairfield County is ripe for the acceptance of solar," Pizzi said.

Both men said the technology has matured over the years and is now made by a variety of companies, including Fairfield-based General Electric Co. They said it is an affordable way to bring electricity into homes and businesses in an

area that has problems moving electricity around. Rountree said he incorporates solar and other energy-saving systems in many of the buildings he designs.

But their best arguments may be Rountree's electricity bills. He said that, since installing his system, his bills have been cut by one-third to one-quarter, depending on the time of year. He now pays between \$50 and \$70 a month, he said, with the price going up when he uses air conditioning, he said.

Another benefit he gets from the system is that when it is particularly sunny out, he actually sells electricity to the grid and receives a credit on his bill. Basically, his electricity meter runs backwards at those times, he said.

Rountree's system cost approximately \$14,000, including installation fees. But the good news for people who want to do this today is that part of those costs will be covered by the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund.

The CCEF is offering rebates of up to \$25,000 per home. The rebate varies by the amount of electricity the system produces, and the payments are sent directly to an authorized installer.

There are eight installers who have been approved to do the work in Connecticut, and CCEF can provide a list for interested people.

Pizzi is himself looking to install a system at his home, but he said he doesn't have a roof that faces south. The panels have to face south in order to catch as much of the sun as possible, he said. So Pizzi is exploring the possibility of erecting solar panels in his backyard.

Contact the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund at (860) 563-0015 for information on solar energy options, or visit the group's Web site at www.ctcleanenergy.org.

Rob Varnon, who covers business, can be reached at 330-6216.



Andreas A. Diaseo/Connecticut Post

Business partners: Mark Pizzi, left, and John Rountree stand in front of Rountree's Westport home, the roof of which is fitted with solar panels. The pair has received grants and given talks on the benefits and cost-efficiency of installing solar panels in the home. They are hoping to attract more attention with CL&P planning a rate increase.