

Rebate Program Intended to Encourage Solar Energy Installations

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Right now, solar panels are installed on the roofs or in the yards of only 17 private residences in Connecticut, but Mark Pizzi and John Rountree of Westport hope that during the next five years, 500 area homes will become equipped to turn the sun's rays into electric current, meeting a portion of residents' power needs and reducing their

monthly utility bills.

Pizzi holds a master of business administration degree and has studied solar energy from a marketing standpoint, while Rountree is an architect who specializes in designing buildings with solar installations. The two advocates for solar energy, co-directors of a group called Solar Connecticut South, recently presented their message to local residents at the Norwalk Public

Library. "If you're in this room tonight you're part of a fulcrum," Pizzi said, suggesting that interest in solar energy is "at the point of break-off to the next level."

A big reason for Pizzi's optimism about the prospects for solar energy in Connecticut is a rebate program that makes the technology more affordable to state homeowners.

The program is administered by the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund, a nonprofit state agency with a mandate to invest in companies producing clean-energy products and services and to educate the public about clean technologies such as solar panels, wind turbines and fuel cells and the generation of energy from biomass — agricultural and wood waste material. The CCEF has awarded a grant to Solar Connecticut South to promote the program in a series of community meetings in Fairfield County. Solar Connecticut South — and its counterpart, Solar Connecticut North, which serves the rest of the state — also receives funding from the Department of Energy's Million Solar Roofs Initiative, which supports states' and local communities' efforts to educate the public about solar energy.

Under the CCEF program, each resident who installs a solar electric system on his or her home is enti-



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John Rountree, a Westport architect who specializes in designing buildings with solar installations, recently presented a message to local residents at the Norwalk Public Library.

tled to a rebate of \$5 for every watt of power the panels produce, up to a maximum of \$25,000 for 5,000 kilo-

watts. The rebate also is available to owners of commercial and industrial buildings.

"Now Connecticut is shaping up to be a leader [in solar energy], with some of the best rebates in the country," said Rountree. According to a CCEF fact sheet, a total of \$3 million is available under the rebate program.

Solar photovoltaic cells, or PV cells as they are called, were first used in the 1950s to provide power for orbiting satellites, Rountree said. One of several examples he displayed at the seminar looked like a prop from *Star Trek*: thin, blue, about four inches square, with a crystalline reflective material buried under its smooth clear plastic surface. Rountree said a solar PV cell is a series of semiconductors made from silicone, which is extracted from sand. For residential or commercial use, a number of cells are combined to make a panel, and each panel, according to Charlie Moret, a CCEF director, produces about 150 watts of power. An arrangement of panels in a particular installation on a residential or commercial roof is called an "array."

The panels produce direct current, which is passed through a device called an inverter that converts it into 120-volt alternating current, so that the power is identical to that supplied to homes by utility companies.

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