
Solar panels pay off in the long run

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Stirling — At least 15 homes in Stirling are being powered by the sun, thanks to a new solar project on Demorest Road.

Cleave Energy Inc., a solar power producer out of Picton, held an open house Saturday at 25 Demorest Rd. in Stirling to showcase a new, \$74,000 solar "micro" electricity generation project. More than 100 people attended and spoke to company representatives.

Pete Anderson, Cleave Energy consultant, was on-hand to explain how the project works.

"It's piece of mind that you're using clean, green energy," he said. "It's reducing some of the dependency on coal-fired energy, which is what we want. It's fantastic."

Unlike conventional solar projects, in which a single home is taken off the grid, the homeowner instead installs solar panels to produce energy and sell back to the grid, he said.

It's a trend that's becoming increasingly popular.

"You're going to see these projects popping up everywhere," he said. "Selling back to the grid is very much a huge investment vehicle."

In this case, the homeowner paid \$74,000 to install several solar panels in their yard that collect energy year-round. A Cleave Energy metre, installed separately from a Hydro metre, reads how much energy they put into the grid — up to 10 kilowatts on a bright, sunny day, he said.

"They're buying power for eight cents (from the Hydro company), then selling it back for 80, 10 times more than what they pay out," he said.

It's a win-win for the homeowner, he added. With the new Green Energy Act of 2009, modelled off a similar act enforced in Germany, the government is guaranteeing it will pay the same rate for green energy producers for the next 20 years.

"They're going to pay about \$74,000 now to install this, but over 20 years, they're going to make about \$260,000 in return," Anderson said. "People think it's too good to be true, but it's not. Now that people have seen these systems pop-up, we're backed up three or four months for installations."

In Hastings County alone, 50 systems have been sold, but, Anderson said, he expects "by the end of the season, you'll probably see a couple hundred sold."

And, because the energy is being created on-site, it's also distributed in the immediate area, he said, allowing 16 to 18 homes to use the energy.

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