

Local contractor offers solar energy installations

By GREG GLASSNER
HP Editor

Almost everyone agrees that solar and wind energy and hybrid or hydrogen-powered cars will become players in our energy future.

On a major scale, these concepts are years off from common usage.

However, the technology for solar-produced electricity is available for businesses and homes right now.

While it may be impractical to add enough solar panels and storage capacity to provide all of your electric needs 24/7, systems are available to supplement the supply from the electrical utility, thus cutting down on your monthly electricity bill.

Solar power is not just for tree huggers and dot.com billionaires, according to Bernie Stanley, who is a contractor and an active member of the Farrington Volunteer Fire Department.

Stanley, who calls himself a political conservative, started Shockoe Solar in the belief that there are enough people out there who want solar power now, rather than waiting for the government and utility companies to warm up to this available energy source.

"I've been a contractor for about 10 years, and I decided to branch out because the construction business has slowed down," Stanley explained.

He went to Sharp Solar in New Jersey for training and certification. Although his new Ashland-based business, Shockoe Solar, does not officially open its doors until October, Stanley has already been measuring and estimating several jobs for clients.

Although we are blessed with a reasonable number of hours of productive sunlight in an average day, Virginians have been slow to embrace solar energy. The reason for this, Stanley said, is that state and local governments have been slow to offer incentives to spur installation of solar units.

Right now, homeowners and businessmen are eligible for a \$2,000 tax rebate, far less than the cost of buying and installing a solar system.



Bernie Stanley does a rooftop estimate for a client. (Contributed photos)

Another reason you don't see solar panels on many homes and offices is that "We actually have pretty cheap electricity in Virginia," said Stanley, who sees that situation changing over the next three years.

"[Dominion] Power has asked for an 18 percent rate increase, and in 2010, deregulation may cause even steeper hikes in electric rates," he added.

Stanley said he likens himself to the guy who was selling CD players when they first came out in the marketplace. He expects to be riding the crest of the wave with his new business.

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