

Hatfield printer invests heavily in solar power

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HATFIELD - A Hatfield business owner committed to the environment sees going green not as a choice, but a necessity.

"If you're a patriot, and you care about the future of this country, you need to do something to stop our reliance on non-renewable energy sources," says Christopher Smith, owner of Hatfield Printing and Publishing. "It's not good enough anymore to sit back and wait for somebody else to make a change. Our future depends on it."

Smith, a 29-year veteran of the Hatfield business scene, has put his money where his mouth is. To date, Hatfield Printing & Publishing boasts the a photovoltaic solar system capable of generating 18 kilowatts through the use of 60 300-watt panels mounted on the roof of a 10,000-square-foot former tobacco warehouse at 19 Prospect St.

The panels generate some 90 percent of the total electricity needed to power the business and his residence, which is under the same roof.

Not only that, but Smith uses recycled paper and vegetable oil inks for printing, heats the building with locally grown shelled corn and makes his business deliveries in a hybrid electric/gas Toyota Prius.

So what does it take to green your business?

Persistence, for one thing. Smith says he worked with Massachusetts Technology Collaborative for about two years before the solar panels were installed last summer.

The red tape involved was complicated, and he found himself in a backlog of customers waiting for panels.

Money, for another. The initial outlay for solar panels, a pellet furnace, and vehicles can be daunting.

The photovoltaic panels were the most costly of the three investments at \$135,000.

Of that, one-half - \$67,500 - was offset by a grant from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative. MTC is funded by the renewable energy portion of electric customers' monthly bills in Massachusetts.

Also, as a small-business owner, Smith qualified for a 30 percent tax credit from the federal government and renewable energy certificates from the state of Massachusetts that pay him 6 cents per kilowatt for



COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER SMITH
Hatfield business owner Christopher Smith installed 60 300-watt photovoltaic panels at a cost of \$135,000 last summer. About half the expense was offset by a grant from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative. The system is capable of generating 18 kilowatts.

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electricity he produces from sunlight annually.

"The estimated payback is in 11 years," he says.

Smith says rebates and grants vary according to installation. So far, although the federal government is fairly generous in providing tax incentives to convert to solar power, the state has been less forthcoming.

"If you want to encourage people to do more of this kind of thing, and get businesses and public buildings on board, you need to make the incentives greater," Smith says.

For example, he has investigated what it would take to install a photovoltaic system on the Hatfield Elementary School.

"It's a great site with lots of southern roof exposure," he said. "But the MTC proposed a tiny system of 2 kilowatts, far too small to make a difference and realize an appreciable savings. What good is that?"

He's hopeful state policies may become more generous in the coming year with Deval Patrick at the helm as governor.

The pellet stove, a Traeger model made in Vancouver, cost \$4,600. Smith estimates he burns 75 barrels of shelled corn a season, which he purchases from a farmer in Hadley.

And though with the mild temperatures in early winter he used the furnace less, it's still a break-even situation, compared with heating with oil at \$2.30 a gallon.

Add to that the Prius Smith uses for business deliveries - the 2007 model comes with a price tag of about \$22,175 - and you've got a business that is mostly nonpolluting and almost completely independent of outside energy sources.

But expensive. For many, prohibitively so.

Money is not the issue, says Smith, whose motivation is to eliminate reliance on fossil fuels and encourage energy independence. "Do I want to support the local economy by buying shelled corn from a farmer in Hadley or do I want to support oil companies who are using my money to go fight wars I oppose?" he says.

"Think about it. In New England today, we produce virtually no energy in the traditional sense. Little pockets of coal here and there, but not enough to make a difference. Whereas a hundred, a hundred and fifty years ago, we had mills that ran on water power. Now we're completely dependent on outside sources."

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