

Rural Acton solar panels -an investment in the future

By Frances Niblock

The four solar panels in the backyard of a Crewson's Corners family make up one of largest residential solar power systems in the province and are an investment in the future.

With his interest peaked several years ago by a sibling who installed solar panels at the family home, rural Acton's Michael Jeffrey finally decided to generate electricity with a solar system when Ontario Power Authority pricing and program changes in October improved the return on his investment.

In a deal that sounds almost too good to be true, Jeffrey, who is saving for

his three children's education, is paid 80.2-cents per kilowatt (kW) for the energy his solar panels generate. He currently pays between five and 10 cents per kW for the electricity to run his home. The province's FIT (Feed In Tariff) and microFit programs are cornerstones of the province's Green Energy Act, designed to jump start Ontario's alternative energy program by providing stable, guaranteed pricing to renewable energy producers of all sizes.

Within six or seven years, Jeffrey said he would recoup his initial outlay – approximately \$100,000 – and will have an annual income of approximately \$16,000

along with the satisfaction of producing, not just using power. Family members consider themselves energy conservationists and have a geothermal heating/cooling system.

"This is something I don't have to work for. The sun is going to come out, and if it doesn't come out today, it will come out tomorrow," Jeffrey said adding there are many roofs in this area with enough space for solar panels that would generate enough to cover the annual property taxes. He said several of his neighbours plan to install solar systems.

Russell Lauzon co-owns Solar Direct Canada, the Richmond Hill company that installed Jeffrey's system that tracks the sun across the sky, said at first people say that the program sounds too good to be true, and then ask why everyone isn't getting into it.

"The money comes from the Ontario Power Agency,



SOLAR SYSTEM: Four solar panels installed in the backyard of a Crewson's Corners residence are putting electricity into the grid and making the homeowner money – part of a provincial program to jump-start Ontario's alternative energy program by providing stable, guaranteed pricing to renewable energy producers of all sizes. – Frances Niblock photo

but it goes to, in this case, Halton Hills Hydro which writes a cheque to the homeowner," Lauzon said.

The province has had 4,400 applications for the microFit program and 1,400 for projects generating more than 10kW and Lauzon expects even more interest.

"People are learning about

this program and this investment that can earn up to 15 per cent return for the next 20 years – that's the length of the OPA contract. You won't get a better investment than that, anywhere," Lauzon said, adding they had over 100 people attend a recent open house at Jeffrey's house.

The Halton Region Solar

Project is hosting a tour of local solar panel installations on March 7, and the Jeffrey's will be one of the stops where homeowners and vendors will discuss how the system works and financial strategies.

For more information visit halton.ourpower.ca or call 905-299-2327.

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Ground breaking Monday for Acton Splash pad

By Frances Niblock

It may be hard to conjure up images of sun-kissed children cavorting in a water park when the ground in Prospect Park is covered in snow, but that's what guests at Monday's ground break-

ing ceremony for the new Acton splash pad will have to do.

Local politicians, Town staff, construction company officials and a member of Superior Glove's Geng family that made a financial contribution will be on hand

to turn a shovel of dirt at the project where work began several weeks ago with the removal of the wading pool, an Acton Centennial project.

The need for additional water play options in Prospect Park were identified in a 1999 park

master plan and in the Town's strategic plan. The Town's 2010 capital budget forecast includes \$426,000 for the project, but since the lowest bid was more than what was budgeted, Town Council approved a financing plan to cover the total \$540,000 cost.

Staff said the wading pool needed major repairs and that the splash pad would be open 1,050 hours per season (Victoria Day to Labour Day) compared to 120 hours for the wading pool. The hourly operating cost for the splash pad is \$19.05 while its \$210.83 for the wading pool.

The splash pad does not require lifeguards, requires less maintenance than a wading pool and saves water by recycling and filtering it back into the system. The splash pad will open this July.

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