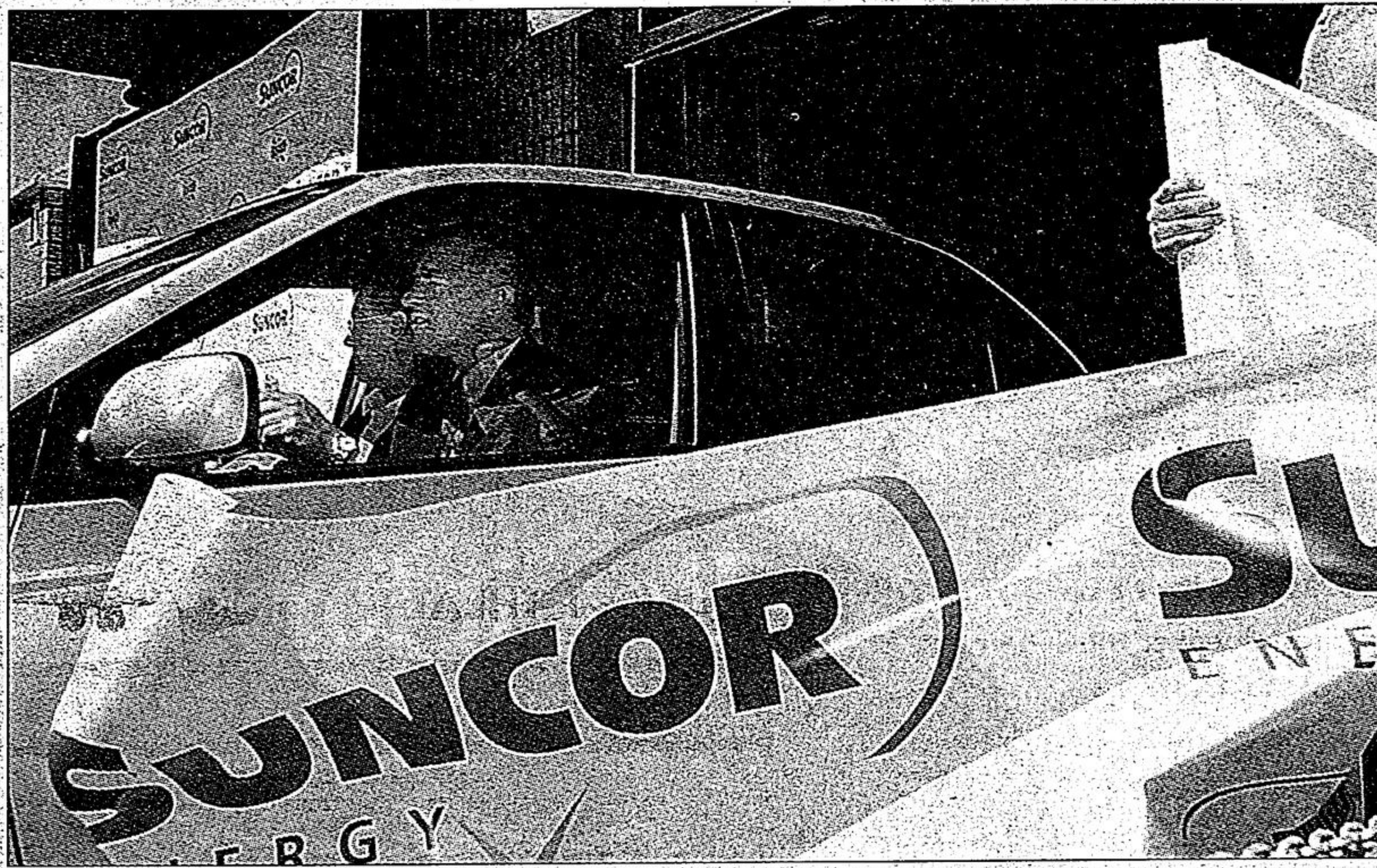


BUSINESS



STAFF PHOTOS/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

SWITCHING TO SOLAR CUTS COSTS

MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

Devinder Minhas already ran one of the busiest car washes in Canada. Now, he has the only one with thermal solar technology to cut its power costs.

"I did 1,565 car washes in one day. That's a record," Mr. Minhas said this week, standing on the roof of his Sunoco station in Markham.

Around him are banks of black plastic panels, warming water pumped to the roof and dropped down to a collection tank. The added warmth is applied through a heat exchanger to water for the car wash.

It's not commercially viable at this stage.

Each car running through Mr. Minhas' nozzles and rollers at McCowan Road and 14th Avenue receives 260 litres of water — the amount an average household uses in a day — and each year Canada's 1,500 car washes use more than two million gigajoules of energy to heat their water.

Based on solar pool-heating

technology, the system will be off from mid-October to mid-April.

Still, the station owner said it would cut the car wash's summer energy bills by 15 to 20 per cent and could be paid off in six years.

So far, however, Suncor Energy Products (formerly Sunoco Inc.), isn't convinced the thermal solar heating — designed by Kitchener's ARISE Technologies — should be standard for its new car washes.

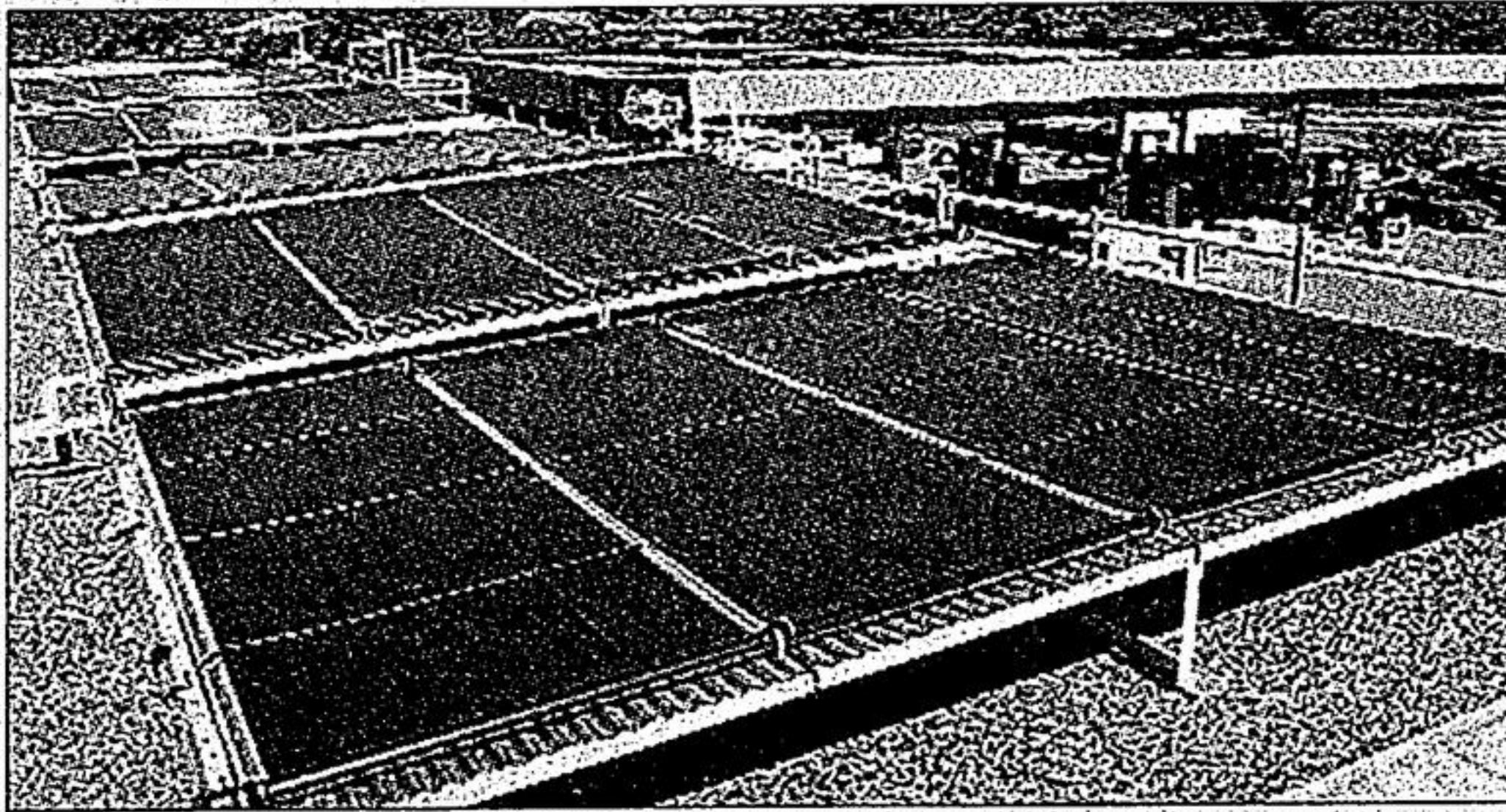
It's not commercially viable at this stage, Suncor's marketing director Steve Douglas explained after a car from Natural Resources Canada — a federal agency that gave Suncor \$15,000 for the project — drove through the wash to inaugurate the thermal system last week.

"It doesn't meet the corporate hurdle rates that you would want for a project," he said.

Eventually, companies will be adding thermal systems because it makes business sense, Mr. Douglas said.

Until then, extra costs from solar power would be passed to the consumer, "and that's not what you want to see happen".

Suncor has committed, however, to spend \$100 million devel-



Brian Moore, of Natural Resources Canada, with Ian MacLellan of ARISE Technologies Corporation in the passenger seat, drives a car through the solar thermal car wash (at top) during its grand opening at the Sunoco gas station on McCowan Road at 14th Avenue in Markham. Solar thermal panels (above) line the roof of the car wash.

oping alternative and renewable energy. "You have to crawl before you can walk," Mr. Douglas suggested.

The same technology installed in Mr. Minhas's station can give home or cottage owners water-heating cost savings of 40 to 60 per cent, which can probably pay off their system in three to five years.

That's the word from Shon Sorensen, in charge of renewable

energy programs at the Kortright Centre for Conservation in Vaughan.

Kortright, which offers a workshop each year on solar thermal power and others on combining solar electric with wind power, demonstrates solar thermal heating at its alternative energy cottage.

There, the pump operating the heat exchanger is run by a single solar electric panel.

Simcoe shoreline likely spot for turbines

A local co-operative says it will soon be prospecting in York Region for wind power to sell.

Windfall Energy Co-op, based in Newmarket, decided this week to hire an expert for the job.

The expert will determine where one and, possibly two, wind-measuring devices called anemometers will be placed at hub level for a wind turbine — 300 feet off the ground — to test wind at local locations.

If substantial wind resources are found here, "it's pretty darn likely that we're going to see a wind farm develop in our region", co-op spokesperson Brent Kopperson predicted Thursday.

Locally, Lake Simcoe's shoreline is believed to be the most likely place to have winds that could power turbines. Placement of anemometers will begin next year in late winter or spring, said Mr. Kopperson, also director of a non-profit company that audits home energy use, Windfall Eco-Works.

The co-op will eventually approach the community that has the most worthwhile wind turbine locations. Each turbine, rotating at 21 times a minute, could supply power to 250 homes.

Ontario's deregulated electricity market has seen several similar co-op ventures emerge recently, all intending to offer a package that includes wind power to local consumers.

The Windfall Energy Co-op formed earlier this year.

Several cooperatives have also considered pooling their investments into a larger project, called Lakewind.

The Lake Simcoe area is thought to be a possible location for Lakewind, as is Kingston and Goderich.

The Ontario Sustainable Energy Association, representing non-profit groups promoting "green" energy, has been relocated from Toronto to the Windfall Ecology Centre, Newmarket's former hydro building.

The same building houses the Windfall Co-op.

— Mike Adler

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