

North Bay Nugget - April 6th, 2010



North Bay Hydro cheques have started trickling in to Steven Draves's mailbox as the first city resident to cash in on the Ontario Power Authority's Micro-Fit Feed-in Tariff program.

Draves contract with the OPA took effect Jan. 18 and payment for the power generated by his 10-kilowatt solar panel system in the first month was \$334.

"It's going to be one of my smaller payments," Draves said, describing how the electricity generation will grow as the sun climbs higher in the sky over his Justin Street roof.

A clear and warm March was exactly what he needed, with his own computer program calculating \$2,000-worth of energy so far under the OPA contract price of 80.7 cents per kilowatt-hour.

"After the summer solstice it hammers down at a more direct angle," he said, adding they expect to earn \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year for two decades.

The province is buying alternative energy produced by small-scale projects at a premium price to spur interest, investment and jobs in the industry.

Draves, who has installed seven systems in the area through his company Solar DC, said he expects to field a lot of questions about the project at the North Bay Homebuilders show at Memorial Gardens this weekend.

Tom Wilcox, chief operating officer at North Bay Hydro, said he knows about four other contract applications for the OPA program, including the 1.2-kw Chippewa Secondary and Intermediate School project.

"There's a lot of interest in the program," Wilcox said and there are many issues people need to consider before making the investment, including how it's considered a taxable income and may effect property assessments.

"I think customers need to see more of it, and actually see on a scale what the potential is," he said.

"You don't have to invest \$100,000," Wilcox said, noting the typical solar panel system is six panels at about \$12,000, which might produce \$1,000-worth of electricity annually under the program.

"If you're going to be in your home for a long time and you're committed to the environment, it's a good way to go."

He also said the price of the systems came down and quality increased as more companies got into distributing them.

Wilcox said the pilot system installed at city hall, which is about the same size as Draves's system, cost \$120,000 three years ago. The price today would be \$40,000 less.

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