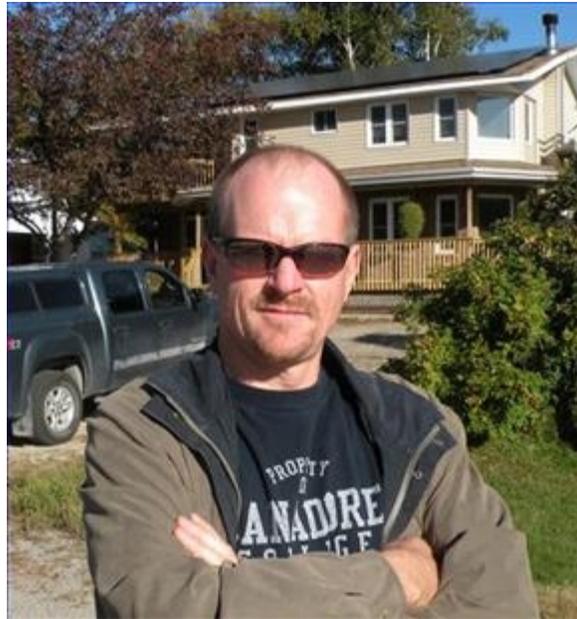


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Powered by the sun

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY: Canadore College instructor plans to sell the power he's generating on his roof

Posted By DAVE DALE THE NUGGET



Nobody was more delighted to have a late-summer burst of sunshine than Steve Draves.

The Justin Street resident spent \$20,000 reconstructing his roof this year while investing \$80,000 in solar energy panels and a grid-tie" system.

Draves installed panels capable of producing 10 kilowatts per hour, the peak generation that can happen for several hours in the afternoon under ideal conditions.

He said it's the maximum payback for the Ontario Power Authority's Feed-In Tariff Program, which is accepting applications beginning Thursday.

This past summer, there wasn't much sunlight," he said, but his panels managed to produce to the grid the excess energy not consumed by their households. Until his application for the more than 1,450 kilowatts Aug. 20 to Sept. 20 when several weeks of blue sky blessed the area. He said it would have been worth \$1,161 under the program the province is funding for up to 100,000 participants.

Draves said the program is different from net metering" agreements in which people sell Feed-In Tariff is approved, Draves said he's producing power for his home and buying everything else he needs from the regular distribution system through North Bay Hydro.

His grid ties can pump all the electricity they produce directly into the system and the homeowner continues to purchase power through the regular distribution system based on its market price structure.

Draves said the Feed-In Tariff Program pays 80 cents per kilowatt for 20 years and he expects to recoup his investment within eight years, offering 12 years of profit.

He said the \$80,000 capital investment is probably the biggest hang up . . . it's going to take a big leap of faith for some people."

Some people might want to finance their systems over a longer term, but Draves said he opted to remortgage his home and direct the \$10,000 in expected annual revenue into premium payments.

The return on investment is between 9% and 12%," Draves said, which outperforms any of his financial investments.

And it's a lock, slam dunk guarantee" once the application is approved at the fixed rate, he said, although his wife asked what would happen if the annual amount of sunshine didn't materialize.

What happens if there is no sun?Well then I will have bigger things to worry about . . . the mortgage isn't going to be on my mind," he joked.

The master electrician is a faculty member at Canadore College teaching in the electrical techniques program and said he wanted to get ahead of the curve when it comes to alternative energy generation.

Draves recently created a business, Solar Distribution Contracting Sales and Service, or Solar DC for short, to offer people in the area a choice over the Toronto-area businesses marketing solar systems.

Draves said Canadians are well behind the wave of solar energy system use in the United States and Europe, where architects and engineers consider the options with every building they construct.

I'm hoping this encourages builders here to reconsider the roof lines . . . so people can take advantage of it," he said.

Draves said a lot people don't understand the potential to produce solar power and the government programs encouraging it.

For example, he said Ontario is offering a provincial sales tax credit for alternative energy products purchased before Dec. 31.

And he said North Bay gets more hours of useable solar rays, citing the Ministry of Natural Resources Canada RETScreen database which provides information for alternative energy project decisions.