

Outlook bright with solar savings

Technology: L.B. man uses panels to heat home, saves \$100-\$200 on bill.

By Molly Haupt
Staff writer

When Craig Durfey first imagined renovating his house with state-of-the-art technology like high-end electronics and heated floors, he also imagined an outrageous electric bill.

But then he came across an alternative energy Web site, and a light bulb clicked. Ever since, he's been watching his electricity meter spin backward and his electric bills plummet because of an investment he made installing solar panels on his rooftop.

The house has been in the family since 1956 but, in April 2005, Durfey purchased 36 panels for \$40,000 and received a \$10,000 tax savings. He also realizes an estimated \$100 to \$200 average savings each month on his Edison bill since the installation, and expects his investment to be fully returned within 10 years, including other benefits and deductions.

"I might have to add another 18 panels to get my (energy) bill to zero dollars, but it's amazing to see how much I'm already saving," Durfey said.

Durfey is a self-proclaimed techno-junkie who envisioned providing his family a safe, efficient, and high-tech home that wouldn't require frequent renovations. He was already using florescent and sensor lights, which help control energy use, but the solar panels allowed his dream to be realized.

"I wanted that plasma television, but it takes a lot of energy," Durfey said. "That meant a higher bill."

But now that expensive, energy-consuming product is more economical because of his monthly savings.

The solar panels cover about half of his roof and catch as much attention as his well-kept landscape. The flowers that surround the entry way from his brick-mounted mailbox to the porch steps are as healthy as his electric savings.

On a recent chilly evening, Durfey's handsome house just east of the Long



The Durfey family — Sharon, Shawn, Matthew, Chris and Craig, from left, has a home equipped with solar panels worth \$40,000.

Diandra Jay/
Press-Telegram

SHINING A LIGHT ON SOLAR ENERGY

Traveling from the sun, light energy in the form of photons hits the solar panels and produces electrons, creating direct current energy. The energy is converted through an inverter to an alternating current, which has its own breaker box and produces power for the house and its appliances.

If the amount of energy being used is less than the amount of energy being produced, the extra electricity makes its way through the house's electricity meter, spins it backward — reducing the electric bill — and sends electricity back to the power grid for others to use.

Initiative program, said Gil Alexander, SCE spokesman. The California Public Utilities Commission created the solar initiative program January 12 and reported in a press release that it is the largest solar program in the country. It's a 10-year, \$2.9 billion program that provides rebates and other incentives to encourage solar panel use.

Mike Mohr, founder of Mohr Power Solar and Durfey's installer, said solar panels are especially efficient in Southern California where the sun shines so often.

"At about 8 a.m. the solar panels begin working here typically, but the peak power hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.," he said.

Ideally, that means a solar-powered home or business could eliminate Edison energy use at least 6 hours everyday, which could do wonders for the monthly bill.

Aside from the consumers' economical savings, the environment is benefiting as well. Solar power is a natural process that helps reduce environmental damage from power plant emissions that also threaten public health.

"My favorite line is, 'We're always hooked up to Edison, the only difference is now we're taking advantage of Edison instead of Edison taking advantage of us,'" Mohr said with a laugh.

Molly Haupt can be reached at molly.haupt@presstelegram.com or (562) 499-1292.

Beach Airport was comfortably warm without the heater on. The insulated wood floors were warm and shiny, and ceiling speakers were wired throughout the house.

Besides the wooden floors, Durfey also purchased energy-efficient wood shutters that help insulate the home and installed two air purifiers that circulate throughout the entire 1,254-square-foot house.

Durfey said he was encouraged by the City Council's recent proposal about installing solar-powered lighting at the

Belmont Veterans Memorial Pier parking lot, but insisted more can be done by the city and other areas of government.

"We need our political machinery to emphasize the renewal of energy, we need all contractors to be educated, and we need trade schools to teach students about this," Durfey said.

Use of solar power is small but growing. Southern California Edison (SCE) currently has 3,824 accounts out of 40.6 million homes and business' it serves. That number is expected to grow because of the recently created California Solar