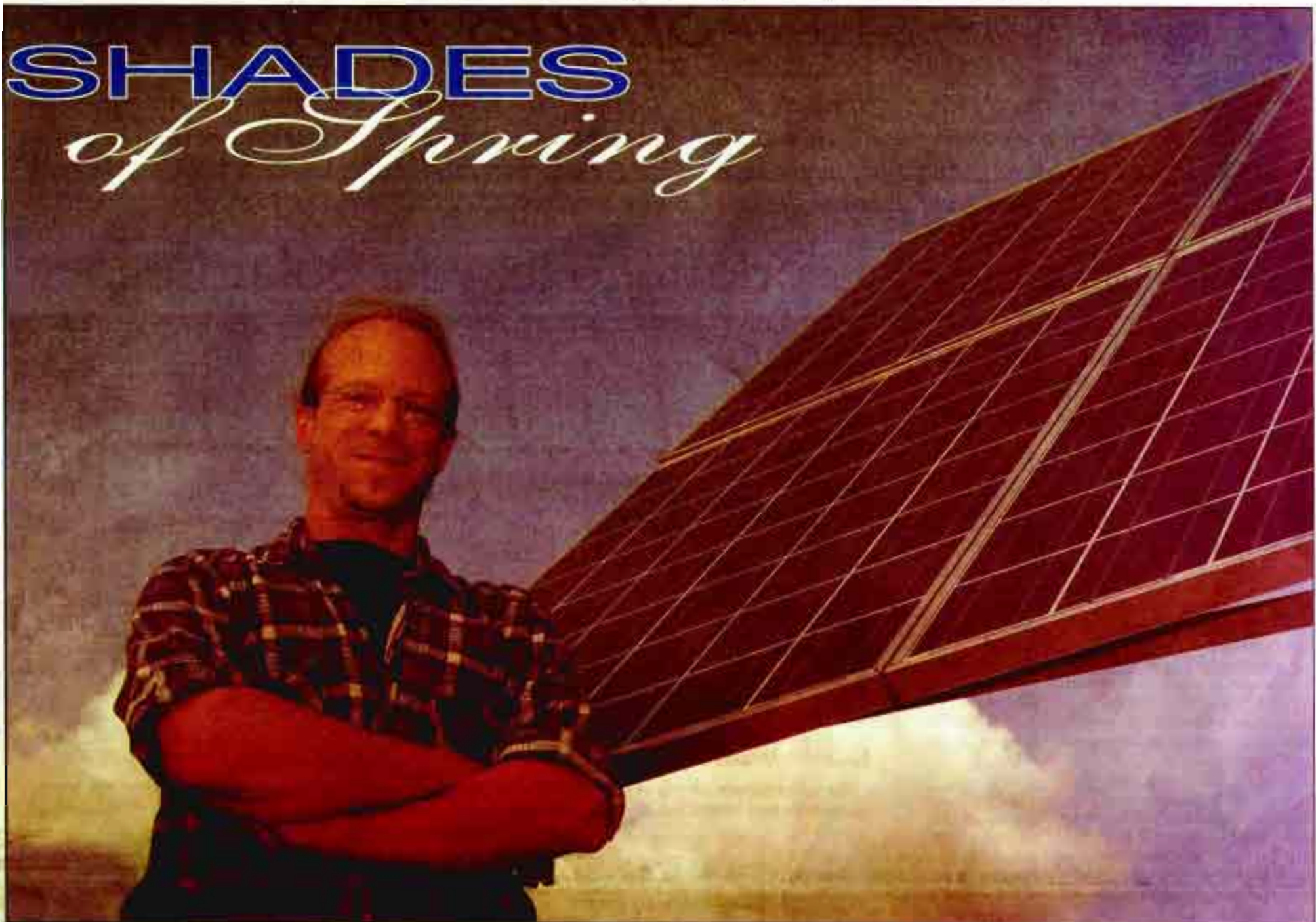


SHADES *of Spring*



Kris Schmid displays the solar panel which provides his own residence with more than enough electricity to keep business running throughout the year.

Following the sun with solar energy

•Solar power as much about ideology as profit for Frederic business.

By **MARTIN LUNDEEN**
Sentinel Reporter

FREDERIC—Legacy Solar may be in the business of selling and installing electric and hot water systems to harness the sun's power, but founder Kris Schmid is the first to admit he's not a salesperson.

"I never pretend to be one," he explained, "I just give people the facts, when you really believe in something it comes across. When you have something you believe in, you become a salesman even if you don't see yourself that way."

Unsurprisingly, Schmid's background is in electrical engineering — not sales. After receiving his degree from the University of Minnesota he worked as an electrical engineer until the company he worked for was bought out by General Electric.

Suddenly finding himself working for a massive corporation, "I wasn't going to fit in," Schmid acknowledged. With this realization, Schmid left his job to pursue livelihood compatible with his own interests and ideals.

"I've always had an interest in doing the right thing

for the Earth and environment, and combined with my background this [solar energy] seemed like a good fit," he said.

And so in 2002, Schmid founded Legacy Solar. Now, five years later the business is installing solar systems which generate electricity and panels which warm water to help heat a home and provide the hot water the house needs.

"I definitely was motivated by ethical and environmental reasons more than financial ones," Schmid said. "Nobody's going to get rich in this business, but I think we're going to see more renewable energy in the future."

Few people would debate this projection as traditional sources of heating and electricity become increasingly controversial for political and environmental reasons.

"People are thinking more about it [renewable energy] now," Schmid said. And for a number of reasons, renewable energy is looking more attractive today than ever before.

The first step in installing a solar system, whether electrical panels or hot-water is a site assessment.

When Schmid performs this step he examines the types and amount of solar energy available at the site, estimates what is needed to maintain and operate a system, studies the home's use of energy, and provides an estimate of what percentage of their needs can be

fulfilled with a solar system.

In order to defray the already nominal cost of the site assessment a 60 percent credit for its cost is available through Wisconsin's Focus on Energy program. The property owner would simply pay Schmid 40 percent of the cost and he receives the balance directly from the state.

More reasons for an upswing in solar energy have been a 30 percent tax credit available from the Federal Government as well as cash back on installations from Focus on Energy.

But the solar boom of the 1970's saw businesses running the gamut from incompetent to unscrupulous come in droves at the chance of turning a quick buck.

"With federal funding, everyone became a solar installer, but there was no certification and no inspection process," Schmid explained.

Thus, Schmid believes one of his most important responsibilities to his clients is to provide them with quality service and knowledgeable answers.

Today, anyone can still technically install a solar system — but if you get your system from Joe's House of Discount Solar and Car Stereos, don't hold your breath waiting for those refund checks.

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Welcome to Burnett County Sentinel's

Shades of Spring

Spring is here, and it's time to think about home improvement projects, remodeling projects or even building that dream home you've always wanted. Whatever your "spring project," this edition is filled with great stories and helpful tips. And don't forget to check out the ads from local businesses ready to help with it all. So, from all of us at the Burnett County Sentinel.....Happy Spring!

Frederic business working to leave a Solar Legacy

Continued from 1

"With programs where people get state funds, there can be an inspection process," Schmid explained. "And the majority of systems are going in under the state program."

And yet while the business side of the solar industry has been making great strides in recent years, the technology behind the panels which provide electricity, heat, and hot water have changed little. But their designs, which worked 20 years ago are still functioning at peak performance today.

According to Schmid, the batteries used to store collected energy are likely to be the highest-maintenance item in a system with no connection to an external power grid.

Panels used to generate electricity will operate like new for around 50 years. After this time they continue to work just fine, but at a lower level of efficiency. A system used to heat water has a life expectancy of approximately 40 years.

As Schmid already explained, he sells solar systems because of his own belief in their worth and necessity. It should therefore come as no surprise to see the multi-faceted blue panel which shines in the noon sun as it strikes his own house.

"I'm very proud to tell people that in a year I supply all of my own electricity from the sun," Schmid said. And while he remains tied to the power grid for times when cloudy weather slows his panels, he comes out ahead at the end of the year.

But if he's really ahead at the end of the year, what happens to the excess electricity generated by his system?

It may sound ludicrous, but on a sunny day, Schmid can walk outside to his electric meter and watch it turn — backwards.

In what is known as "net metering", homeowners who are generating more electricity than they use have the option of sending the power right back down the lines, and selling it back to their utility company at the same rate they would normally pay for it.

"The energy from my panels goes back into the line and to another house," Schmid explained. "One time I asked my neighbor, 'So, how do you like that solar electricity?' He just said 'What?'" Schmid laughed.

So, does this sound interesting to you — after all, who wouldn't want to walk outside and watch their meter turning backwards?

One of the most important facts to remember about a solar system is that it does not need to be your sole source of power or hot water.

By supplementing solar power with a connection to local utility companies one can reap the environmental and economic benefits of solar power without relying on batteries to carry them through a cloudy day.

A minimum size is necessary for a solar electric system to function, as the inverters which convert DC power from the solar panels to the AC power used in households require a certain level of voltage to function.

But for some, the investment required to use solar electricity is prohibitively expensive and the eventual economic payoff simply takes too long.

As a result of these concerns Schmid began installing solar water heating panels. "I branched into the water systems because if people have a limited budget it's going to be their first choice," he explained.

And while their projected lifespan is slightly less than electric panels, a solar water heating system offers the benefit of lower upfront costs and a shorter wait for the financial benefits.

In addition to supplying hot water for uses like washing clothes, showers, and dishes, hot water systems can provide heat for an existing radiant or forced-air system.

Even if you can't afford to install a solar system at this point, there are still a number of simple steps you can take to cut your energy use — and bills. Then, should you decide to invest in a system in the future, you'll be ahead of the game.

One of the simplest things one can do is to switch from incandescent to compact fluorescent light bulbs in their home.

"If every United States household changed one bulb from incandescent to compact fluorescent, the energy savings would equal the output of a nuclear power plant," Schmid explained.

And while it has been repeated over and over, always remember to just turn off the lights when you leave a room.

Electronics are a little trickier, as they continue to draw power even after you turn them "off."

A solar legacy/Page 3



The solar panels on top of this cabin provide the occupants with year-round heating and hot water while blending in with the surrounding foliage.. Special Photo.

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Frederic business working for a solar legacy

Continued from 3

So, in order to turn off electronics which go into "sleep" mode one can plug them into a power strip, allowing you to activate a TV, stereo, and DVD player with just one switch.

One question Schmid asks when performing a site assessment is "how much time is your TV on?" And while many are proud to say they only watch TV one hour per day, the reality is this:

If you only watch one hour of TV but keep the TV plugged in for the other 23 hours, your television is actually using more power when you're not watching it.

Larger appliances are also worth taking a look at, and if shopping for a new appliance, one should purchase one with the Energy Star seal.

When it's time to do laundry, a front-loading washing machine will use less electricity and water than a top-loader, and a great deal of energy can be saved through using the solar clothes dryer you probably already have in your backyard — the clothesline.

And for those building a new home, it's always easier to incorporate solar energy sources in while building than retrofitting them to the structure.

One of the easiest ways one can do when planning a new home is to simply put most of the windows on the south-facing side to utilize passive solar heating.

Already doing these things but want to do more? "If you've made most energy-saving changes to your house, the next logical step is to start producing some of your own energy," Schmid said.

"Solar energy gives a sense of independence, reduces greenhouse gasses and mercury which we're putting in the atmosphere. For the country, it reduces our dependence on foreign sources of energy.

"Think of it as an investment for your grandchildren," Schmid added, "that was part of why I called my company Legacy Solar."



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