

Farm-Way solar system on line; making nearly half of its power needs

By Bernie Marvin

BRADFORD—On any good day around the huge Farm-Way complex on Route 25, a recently installed solar system is silently generating nearly half the electrical needs that will keep computers, lights and appliances and everything else electric humming along.

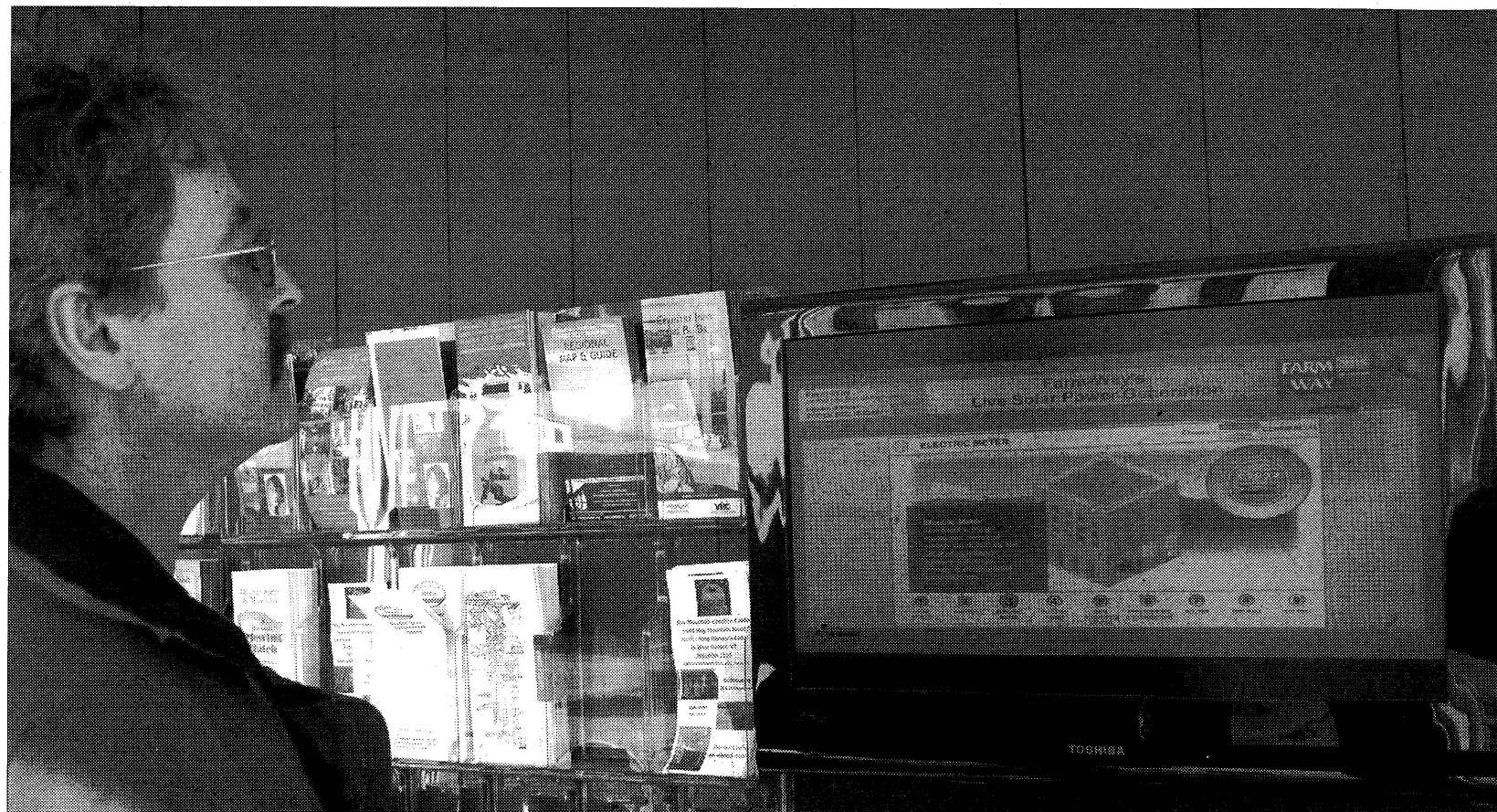
This accomplishment is the result of several years of heavy investment in something the business owners all believe in. Their investment of more than \$240,000 in this \$400,000 project has, so far, provided them and others, an inside look at just how quickly the business of solar has changed since they began to look seriously at going solar.

For the average person, solar power is a mystery. You take a bunch of shiny plates, anchor them in a field or on your roof, and let the sun beat down on them and, voila... you have all the free power you need.

Well, it is not exactly that easy. Ask the clerk of the solar works at Farm-Way, Phil "Skip" Metayer and he'll tell you all about it in simple terms, in a manner that is quite easy to understand. For someone who has been with the company's solar project from day one, it is a good project, it is a commitment and, he'll note, the face of solar changes by the hour.

The system went on line February 1 of this year and now generates between 42 and 45 percent of their electrical power needs. He said when the store is closed on Sundays, as it always is, they can create more power than they use, even though there are many fixtures and other items operating.

He said there were a few "hiccups" at first, but things have smoothed out and the plans for the system's future are to double the size of it so the company's vast layout can all



Skip Metayer, Vice President of Farm-Way of Bradford checks a computer terminal in the store's Route 25 entranceway that monitors the company's recent solar energy installation. www.vermontgear.com also carries interesting facts about the company's solar program. TBWS/Bernie Marvin

be operating on the power created by the sun.

He said that a customer told them of some of the advances and usefulness of harvesting solar power for individual use several years ago, Metayer said now that the system is up and running, they are very pleased with the output as the system is presently operating.

He said when government incentives come on line as promised and continue to assist with clean energy projects in the face of a bad economy, much more work could be done in harnessing the sun's energy. Metayer noted that the US Department of Agriculture and the Vermont Clean Energy Fund presently issue those solar funds

The system's installer, Gro-Solar of White River Junction, made a proposal to the Vermont-based fund and they were successful in getting some funding help. He

said Farm-Way also applied to the USDA for funding, but that grant proposal was set aside.

They could have resubmitted the USDA grant request, but it would have prolonged the project, something they had been working on for about the past three years.

Metayer said three years is a long time to work on their solar plan and they felt it was time to get it working, so they let the USDA proposal go by. They moved the project forward and now the system is up and operating, he said, something the public, the company personnel and others in the solar operation business can now see and experience.

There is a continued stream of people wanting information on the solar system since it went on line. In the lobby of the store, they have installed a unique computer screen that shows just how

much energy is being captured at any one time, plus other interesting information on this fascinating system.

That information is also available on the company website www.vermontgear.com in the Ecoworks tab.

Metayer said it is a good feeling to know the company can build a system that really interests others, especially individual homeowners who are interested in clean energy that is being generated from sunlight.

He said the prospect, the incentives and the materials involved in a solar project improve all the time and there are more homeowners and business owners getting into it. Now that Farmway is into it, they plan to continue adding more solar panels within the next few years.

To the rear of the company's extensive mix of buildings

that contains their \$4 million inventory in footwear, clothing, sporting goods, house wares and furniture (plus a whole lot more!) is the solar panel field.

These panels gather light, send it over to a nearby power converter where it is changed into electrical energy and sent throughout the buildings in the form of conventional electrical power.

Metayer said the field out back is large enough to install as many panels as needed to get the system up to providing 100 percent of Farm-Way's power needs for the future.

He said the 308 solar panels now installed there fill only a small portion of the land they own there and allows plenty of space for expansion.

This ambitious project by the Farm-Way family that includes Paul and Bobbie Gallerani, daughter Carol,

husband, Skip and many, many more dedicated people know that what they are all contributing to is the vanguard of what many are going to do in working with the environment.

A glance at the monitor in the entrance way of their store shows that their solar efforts will remove 76,000 pounds of carbon from the air in a year by using power not generated by something that burns and pollutes the atmosphere we breath.

This is a grass roots effort by Skip and Paul and the folks at Farm-Way to convert to solar power. They promote it in the store, tell customers about it and wholeheartedly endorse the solar concept.

That's great business planning, an unselfish effort in a community, and this huge effort is all good for the environment, too!