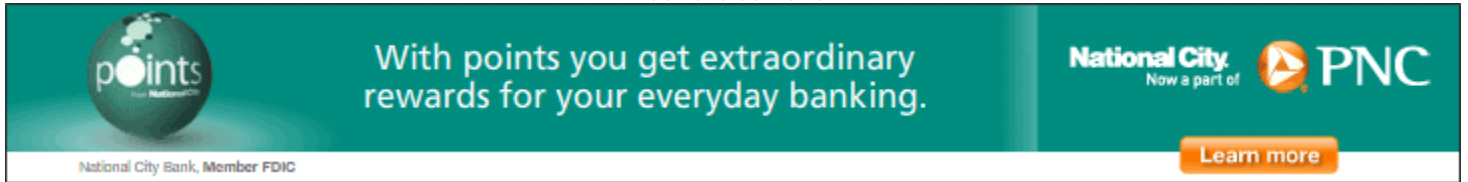


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## Green incentives fuel interest in solar power in Toledo area Homeowners cashing in on improvements

By **GARY T. PAKULSKI**  
BLADE BUSINESS WRITER



Jason Arnold, left, and Sam Villarreal install a solar panel on a Toledo home. Heated anti-freeze is pumped through pipes into a coil system that warms water in a tank for home use.

( THE BLADE/LORI KING )

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Chris Thompson figures he'll gain a little energy independence and his teenage son will be able to take long showers free from parental complaints about utility costs.

The Washington Township homeowner is joining a small but growing group of Americans who are installing solar-powered water heaters.

"I'm getting excited to see how it works," said the 59-year-old boilermaker, who expected installers from Toledo's Solar Solutions and Skylights to start work today.

Generous federal tax credits, and subsidies provided by an Ohio nonprofit group, are sparking interest in the still-exotic method of heating water for bathing, clothes-washing, and other uses.

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates such systems, which rely on rooftop solar units, can cut water-heating bills by 50 percent to 80 percent. Heated anti-freeze is pumped from the roof through pipes into a coil system that warms water contained in a tank that is similar to a conventional hot-water tank.

Homeowners can claim a credit of 30 percent of purchase and installation costs on their federal tax returns.

They also can get a rebate of up to \$2,400, depending on the size of the system, from nonprofit Green Energy Ohio with use of an approved installer. The organization will distribute \$250,000 under the program launched April 1.

With the tax credit and subsidy, a homeowner can cut the usual \$8,000 to \$9,000 cost in half, said Athan Barkoukis, program manager for Green Energy Ohio.

The systems are typically combined with existing, conventional water heaters. With savings from reduced electricity and natural gas use, the sun-powered systems typically pay for themselves in 10 years or less, Mr. Barkoukis said.

He is processing applications for 10 residential systems installed so far across Ohio. The organization's research found that, before the current initiative, there were only 50 systems statewide. The only other approved installer in Toledo is Advanced Distributed Generation LLC.

Mr. Thompson of Washington Township learned about solar water heaters at the Toledo Home & Garden Show, sponsored by the Professional Remodelers Organization. He anticipates that utility cost savings will cover the initial purchase price, including subsidies, within five years.

His main reason for buying the system, he said, was to gain independence from Toledo Edison and Columbia Gas of Ohio.

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