

DEP secretary unveils benefits of solar energy in Bucks

David Campbell

Duane Malone probably didn't expect to host a press conference on his rear patio when he initially thought about going solar in February.

But there was Malone Friday morning looking on as state Sen. Robert "Tommy" Tomlinson and Department of Environmental Protection Secretary John Hanger made a few brief remarks a few paces from Malone's backdoor on the status – and benefits – of solar energy.

"There has never been a better time to look at solar," said Hanger. "You're part of the solar revolution."

Malone's residence in Jamison was the first stop on a two-part tour of new Bucks County solar users. The tour, coordinated by the Department of Environmental Protection, sought to showcase the innovative technologies and economic opportunities of solar power.

A visit to Chant Engineering in New Britain followed the stop in Jamison.

"I just think it makes a lot of

sense," offered Tomlinson, discussing the benefits of collecting the sun's rays for energy. "It's a boost to the economy, it creates jobs, it keeps people's rates down."

Plus, Hanger indicated, the cost of installing a solar system is plummeting. He relayed that costs are down about 50 percent since 2008.

Malone's residence became the first in his neighborhood to be outfitted with solar panels. Malone hired Astrum Solar, a multi-state installer of residential and small commercial solar panel systems in the Eastern United States, to install a 7.2-kilowatt residential system on his roof.

The installation features 40 panels in three different arrays; the majority of the panels are positioned facing south to gather the sun's rays at all times.

Using the federal tax credit, state rebate, not to mention the savings from monthly electric bills, Malone figures he'll have his system paid off in three to three and a half years.

"It was a no-brainer," said Malone.

Although the solar panels are noticeable on Malone's roof, they



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Scott Brown, right, of Astrum Solar talks about the benefits of solar energy to, from left, DEP Secretary John Hanger, state Sen. Tommy Tomlinson and Cindy Beck of state Rep. Bernie O'Neill's office.

are far from an eyesore, he indicated. The black panels blend into Malone's black roof.

Malone was a strong candidate for solar because of the direction he house faced and the absence of shade trees. "A perfect location," he stressed.

affected?

According to Astrum, a solar system will only help property value. An article in *BusinessWeek* demonstrated that homes with solar panels sell faster than non-solar homes. According to *The Appraisal Journal*, a home's value is increased by \$20,000 for every \$1,000 reduction in annual operating costs from energy efficiency.

Solar energy is also a benefit to the environment. For instance, Malone has, among other things, reduced his carbon footprint. The family's solar system is the equivalent of planting about 150 trees every year, said Michelle Waldgeir, vice president of marketing for Astrum Solar.

Solar promotes job growth, added Hanger, pointing out that Astrum has hired 30 Pennsylvanians this year.

"Every job is so incredibly important," said Hanger.

For Malone, it was a chance to help out his country – by cutting down on foreign oil – as well as provide a sense of security for his family, knowing that he will not have to face electricity rate increases again.

"It's a great idea," he said, simply.

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For the first time since the July 8 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday/Monday

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