



Main Line Life photo — PETE BANNAN

Alan and Jan Marie Rushforth look at the solar energy system on their Bryn Mawr home.

## Turning his passion into a business

### Bryn Mawr man's company installs solar energy to apartment buildings and other commercial properties

By Chris Williams

If you're like most people, the only object you've powered with solar energy is maybe a calculator — certainly not your home or business. But one Main Line resident is trying to change that.

Alan Rushforth, manager of Rushforth Solar LLC, has had a keen interest in solar energy for decades. It wasn't until about three years ago, however, that the Bryn Mawr resident was able to devote some serious time to solar energy research.

Rushforth's research led him to embark on a "major energy efficiency renovation," as he describes it, to his own home. And over the last three years, Rushforth has been working on installation of a solar energy system to his house, which includes photo voltaic, solar hot water and solar hot air panels.

His work didn't end there, though, as Rushforth developed a business idea during the course of his home project.

"I had a background in apartment management, and I was interested in how this could apply to apartment buildings," he said.

From there, Rushforth designed a turnkey business package to include economically viable systems for apartment buildings and other commercial properties.

age tanks, and system piping and controls. According to the Rushforth Solar Web site, there are also space requirements necessary to allow for proper alignment, array and tilt of the collectors, as well as for adequate tank space (to store heated water).

Rushforth said he hopes to turn more businesses on to solar hot water systems, as they are more effective than the popular photo voltaic systems.

"[Photo voltaic] tends to get most of the attention, rather than hot water," he said "even though hot water tends to pay for itself more quickly."

Under optimal conditions, most photovoltaic systems collect about eight to 21 percent of solar energy, while solar thermal collectors can collect about four times that percentage.

With energy prices continuing to rise, Rushforth said the demand for solar systems is increasing. And with good reason: There's a 30 percent, uncapped federal tax credit available for commercial solar hot water installations through 2008. (The 30 percent credit is also available for residential installations, but with a \$2,000 cap.)

The estimated payback period for solar energy varies per system. According to Rushforth's Web site, commercial and residential solar hot water have the quickest payback periods, of about four to eight



Alan Rushforth points out one of the solar vents that are installed in his home.

## Idea makes 'cents' at workshop

Radnor Elementary School, with its roof-installed solar energy system, was a fitting location for state Rep. Greg Vitali's Jan. 25 workshop titled "Do Solar Panels Make Cents for You?"

The event was billed as a workshop focused on increasing the use of solar panels, and offered residents information to help them decide if solar panels make sense for their home or busi-