

Elkins Park condominiums going 'green' with solar hot water system

By Paul Nasella
Staff Writer

Although Elkins Court Condominiums may look like just another historic building in Elkins Park, one quick glance at the solar panels on its roof paints quite a different picture.

Each of the panels are part of a solar hot water system currently being installed to make the complex one of the first "green" buildings in the township.

Spearheaded by residents and Elkins Court Condominium Association Board of Directors President Rosalie Frudakis, treasurer Stephen Ettinger and secretary Sally Crone, the new \$50,000 system is part of an effort to increase energy efficiency while decreasing energy costs since the condominiums became self-managing in January.

"That's when we started looking at our costs," Ettinger said. "It became quickly evident that 57 percent of our costs were utilities and the largest part of that cost was natural gas, which we used for heating and hot water."

Low cost, energy-efficient fluorescent lights were first installed throughout the condominium's common areas in February and a solar hot water system was found to be an ideal match for the building, constructed in 1927, following many meetings with residents, experts, engineers and consultants.

"As it turned out," Ettinger explains, "The configuration of our roof and our basement are perfect for solar hot water because we're an old building. It's very weird."

Currently being installed by Alan and Ray Rushforth of Rushforth Solar, LLC, the system consists of a 3,000-gallon tank in the basement of the building connected to a series of pumps and pipes that send water to the roof, where it passes through 17

aluminum 4-by-8-foot panels and is heated 10 to 15 degrees. The heated water then travels back down to the tank through pipes in the building's incinerator shaft.

Due to the tank's size and the building's age, each resident draws hot water from the same source and will benefit in that hot water will be free in the summer. During the winter, residents of the 21 units will only pay a percentage of hot water costs due to decreased sunlight and conventional hot water heater use.

"The goal is to cut the annual fuel bill for hot water by 50 percent," Rushforth Solar President Alan Rushforth, said.

The new system will save residents about \$8,000 a year in fuel costs for hot water and is partially funded by a \$6,250 grant from The Reinvestment Funds' Sustainable Development Fund, created by the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission in its final order in a PECO Energy electric utility restructuring proceeding in April 1998.

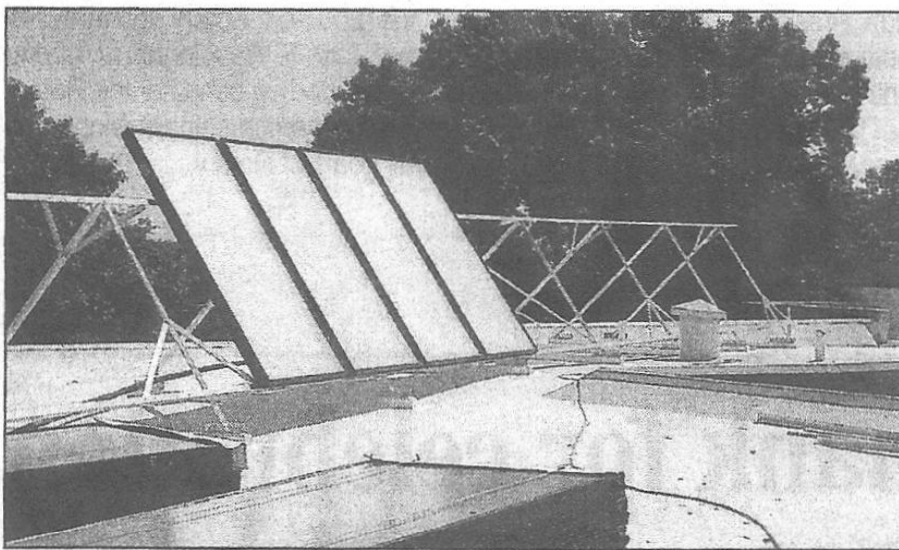
Residents are also eligible to receive a tax credit of up to \$2,000 due to the Energy Policy Act of

2005, which provides a credit equal to 30 percent of qualifying expenditures for the purchase of solar water heating property used exclusively for purposes other than heating swimming pools and hot tubs.

"What we're trying to do is make [the condominiums] more energy efficient than the average house would be," Ettinger said, adding each condominium is 2,400 square feet and features three bedrooms. "By governing ourselves, we want more of a community here, and the first issue that came up really was 'how do we make the place green?' Because it's economically viable, the two together have set us down this path."

Ettinger, however, said despite the benefits, going green via solar hot water wasn't always such an easy sell.

"We had to convince all the owners that this was a viable and good thing," Ettinger said. "It was a struggle because it's new. We have people who have lived here for many years. So it actually had to be marketed to the members."



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Elkins Court Condominiums has solar panels on its roof as part of a solar hot water system.