

Sunny time for solar system installers

Tax incentives for renewable energy projects boost orders

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Through late last year and into January, solar installer Gary Minnick was averaging about one job a month. Then in February, things began to heat up.

"Since then I've been averaging about one installation a week," said Minnick, owner of Go Solar, a Riverhead company that builds solar photovoltaic (PV) systems that generate electricity from rooftop panels.

Another installer, Marc Clejan, co-owner of GreenLogic in Southampton, said business for solar PV has doubled for his company since last year.

"Through the first two weeks of May last year we had 25 solar PV installations," Clejan said. "We have about 50 installed so far this year." GreenLogic is projecting 176 installations this year, up from 75 last year.

Long Island solar installers like Minnick and Clejan are benefiting from a part of the federal stimulus package that extended many consumer tax incentives for renewable energy projects, including solar PV, solar water heating and geothermal heat.

The big winner on Long Island appears to be solar PV, which — in addition to a cap-free 30 percent federal tax credit — also is eligible for a Long Island Power Authority rebate and a 25 percent New York State tax credit. The stimulus package



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SOLAR SAVINGS

How tax incentives and rebates reduced Ronkonkoma homeowner Vincent Taormina's investment in solar energy.

	Photovoltaic system	Solar hot water
Net retail cost	\$70,477	\$9,750
Rebate from utility	\$33,110	\$1,500
Federal tax credit (30 percent)	\$11,210	\$2,000
NY State Tax Credit (25 percent / \$5,000 cap)	\$5,000	\$2,438
Total incentives	\$49,320	\$5,938
Cost to homeowner	\$21,157	\$3,812

NOTES: PV system rebate is from LIPA. Hot water rebate is from National Grid.

eliminated a \$2,000 cap on the federal tax credit for solar PV.

Depending on system size and access to the rooftop, most installations take three to five days, according to Minnick's company.

Michael Deering, LIPA's vice president of environmental affairs, said applications for the utility's solar PV rebate —

\$3.50 a watt — have tripled, to 180, from last year.

"The lifting of the cap on the federal tax credit has helped," Deering said. "In a time of economic decline, solar is proving to be a very good investment for homeowners."

Exactly, reasoned Vincent Taormina, 38, a state trooper

Vincent Taormina had two solar systems installed on his Ronkonkoma home — a photovoltaic system, at left, to generate electricity, and panels, on roof at right, to heat water.

who in April purchased his first home — a remodeled Colonial in Ronkonkoma.

"I always thought it was a neat thing," he said, "because you pay for it once, and then no utility bills."

Taormina, who described himself as a longtime fan of renewable energy, hired GreenLogic to install two systems — a 9,460-watt array of solar PV panels and a solar water-heating setup — at more than \$80,000, before rebates and tax credits. After applying all the incentives — including an



NEWSDAY PHOTO / ANA P. GUTIERREZ

GreenLogic's Marc Clejan says his photovoltaic business has doubled since last year.

extra \$10,135 because of the federal stimulus package — total cost for the two systems was slightly less than \$25,000.

"At first, I thought the incentives were going to expire in December," Taormina said. "I didn't know that many of them were extended and the cap lifted. That was a nice surprise."

Clejan said the PV system (net cost \$21,157) is projected to pay for itself in about eight years and will virtually eliminate Taormina's electric bill. The water-heating system (net cost \$3,812) will reduce Taormina's natural gas consumption by about 25 percent and pay for itself in about three years.

"I like the idea of making our country less dependent on foreign oil," Taormina said. "It's somewhat patriotic. Being green is good for the country."