

Sun of a gun

Conyers businessman takes strong stand on potential of solar energy

By Lee Kolb
Neighbor Staff Writer

New tax reform legislation authorized by Congress, which purports to save certain groups of American taxpayers time and money, has sorely neglected solar energy needs, according to Sam Hay, owner of Universal Solar Products in Conyers.

Prior to the tax reform, solar energy applications offered homeowners "40 percent residential bottom line credit," Hay said. The Reagan administration views solar power as a holdover from the Carter era, and this feeling has tainted reactions of lawmakers to exploring possibilities in this field, Hay believes.

The new laws allow no deductions to homeowners who are considering solarizing their homes.

Cognizance of solar power as a legitimate alternative energy source emerged from the Arab oil embargo of '73, but "five or six years passed" before sluggish members of Congress enacted legislation to further solar research, Hay explained.

"President Jimmy Carter set a goal whereby 20 percent of the nation would be solar-powered by the year 2000," Hay said. The tax cuts stem from the anti-Carter attitude currently infecting the White House, he believes.

"When the solar collectors were removed from the White House roof and given to the (National) Park Service, a White House staffer was heard to comment 'there goes the last of Jimmy Carter,'" Hay recollected.

Federal tax-credit slashing has put 30,000 solar energy-related employees out of work overnight — "the equivalent of three steel mills," he said.

Legislators do not perceive the seriousness of the nation's predicament.

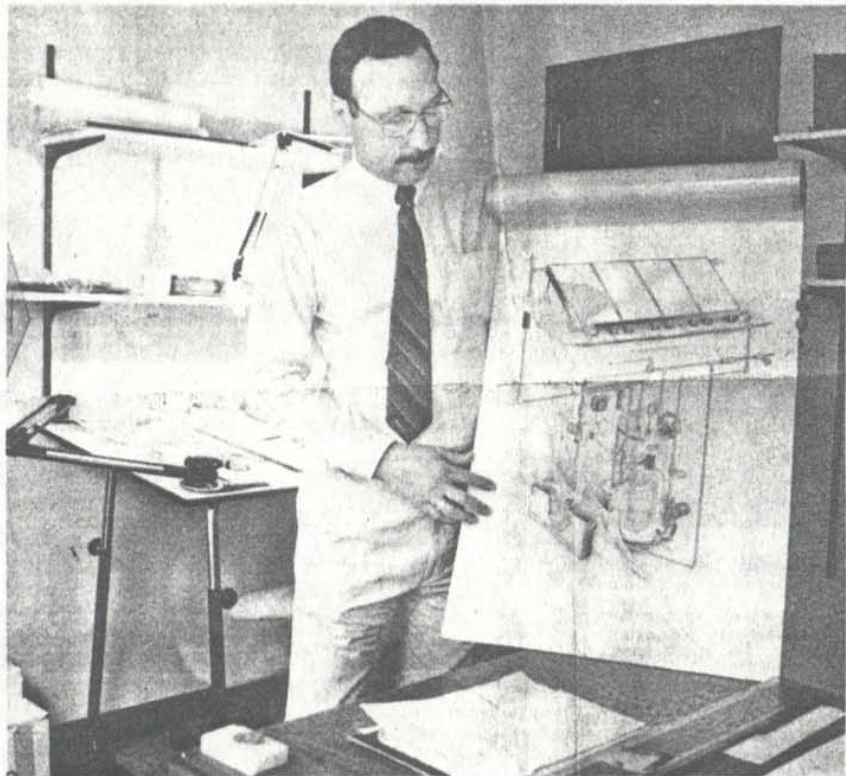
Hay said members of Congress, whom he calls puppets of the powerful thermonuclear lobby — "the biggest one there is" — have doled out \$200 billion dollars to thermonuclear interests over the past several years.

"Congress has been unable to overcome the power of the gas, electricity, and nuclear lobbies," Hay said.

Waning natural gas reserves and nuclear power plant inefficiencies do not justify the huge sums allocated to the industries, he said.

"We are continuing to fund dinosaurs. With so much money, these industries have become self-perpetuating," he added.

There has long existed "an unpublicized war" between thermonuclear and solar forces, according to Hay.



Staff photo by Kathryn Kolb

SIMPLE TECHNOLOGY: Universal Solar Products owner Sam Hay with home solar installation diagram available through his company.

"It has roots with Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse vying for funding from financier J.P. Morgan," he said.

Edison wanted small, independently-operated DC-current power plants, and Westinghouse argued for large, transmission-line AC-powered conglomerations, Hay explained.

"Morgan, being a capitalist, funded George because the large AC operations would be easier to control."

Hay pointed out that with a minuscule (by comparison) budget of \$250 million, solar works are already producing 9.6 percent of the nation's energy.

"The known natural gas reserves are good for nine years," he said.

According to Hughes Tool, Inc., a firm that leases drilling equipment to gas seekers founded by the late Howard Hughes, there were 4500 offshore natural gas drilling rigs in 1981. Now there are less than 600.

"After conflicts with environmentalist groups several years ago, the gas companies got offshore drilling rights and searched for gas reserves. They found nothing," Hay said.

Hay predicts that natural gas will run out, on the residential level, in four to six years.

"Natural gas cannot be viewed as a long-term fuel source," he said. He believes nuclear power cannot be relied upon, either.

"Every nuclear plant extant or under construction in the United States, operating at peak capacity, could supply only two percent of the country's energy needs," Hay said, drawing his figures from the findings of the information-gathering Rocky Mountain Institute.

Solar power's rapid emergence into the area of energy sources "has made gas, coal, and electricity paranoid," he explained.

"There is a subliminal, negative view of solar energy fostered by the

thermonuclear industry," Hay said.

He cited a television commercial sponsored by the thermonuclear industry describing efficient solar power use as being "many tomorrows away."

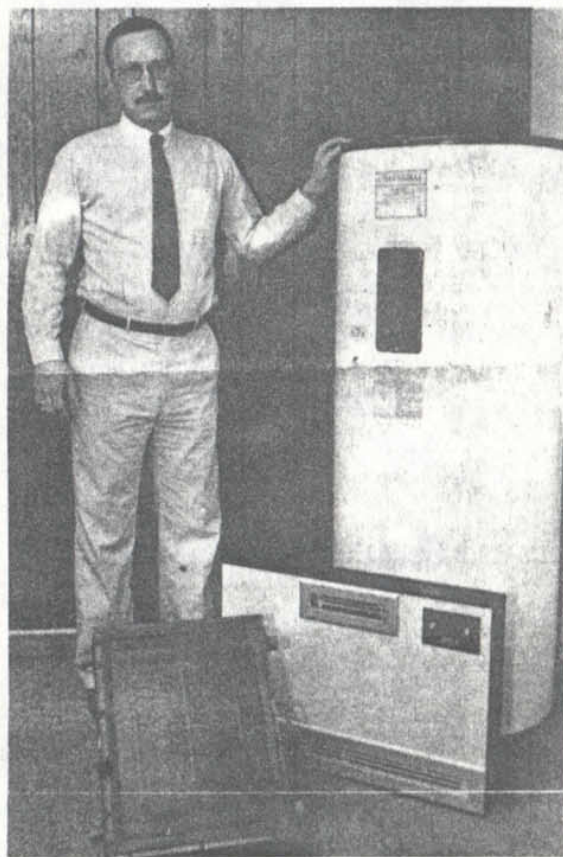
"There are subconscious barriers to solar power," Hay said. "People grow up believing that you must pay a utility bill."

Without a car bill, utility bill, and house payments, "you can live comfortably on six or seven thousand dollars a year," he said.

Though the federal government ignores solar energy, the state of Georgia does not, and homeowners utilizing solar cells in the Peach State are granted state tax credits.

"If you put up \$6,000 for solar power in Conyers, Georgia will give you 1,000 of those dollars back," Hay explained.

Assuming that a basic utility bill of \$150 increases 15 percent over the next 20 years, that solar system will



Staff photo by Kathryn Kolb

HARNESSING THE SUN: Latter-day Prometheus Sam Hay makes it his business to bring the firepower of the sun to earth through these home solar appliances.

produce \$100,000 in free energy. "You can pay your house off with that," he said.

Hay said another obstacle to the advancement of solar power is ignorance among banks and institutions which lend money.

He noted that getting a household solar system financed was almost impossible.

"The technology intimidates conservative bankers who don't understand it, and the Atlanta market poses a real problem for financing," he said.

Hay believes the time when the U.S. will have to look to the sun for energy is drawing near, and those countries already looking that way are far ahead.

"The international bankers will

come in and eat our lunch," he said. "Canada already offers 50 percent tax credits for solar power. Japan, Israel, and other technically intellectual nations are eliminating the need for nuclear power by pressing solar energy."

"The catalyst that will force this country to harness the sun will be the crisis, or catastrophe, engendered by the exhaustion of the fossil fuels, according to Hay.

"There should be legislation making a solar appliance in all new homes built mandatory," he said.

Hay invites people to compare solar energy to "traditional" power sources and make their own judgments.

"There is no other investment that returns so well," he said.