

Dollar Savings Keep Confederation Place Owners Hot on Trail of Solar Technologies - By Glenn Hasek

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Bill Allinson, one of the owners of the Confederation Place Hotel here, was skeptical at first when approached several years ago about installing a \$52,000 rooftop solar water heating system. At the time he thought that money could be better spent on FF&E, marketing and other necessities. Eventually, he changed his mind and now the 95-room property is benefiting big time from a system he describes as almost maintenance-free.

With the help of a federal grant, which took care of 25 percent of the system's cost, a 20-panel rooftop system was installed on the hotel's roof in November 2005. Each panel measures 4 feet by 8 feet and the system is configured in two 10-panel sections.

'We were the first hotel in eastern Canada to have this type of system up and running,' says Allinson, who adds that it saved his family \$10,300 in fuel costs in 2006.

One might not expect there to be enough sunny days in Ontario to warrant such a system but Allinson says it works even on cloudy days. Food-grade glycol is heated as it passes through the solar panels. It then travels to a heat exchanger where it pre-heats the water coming into the hotel from the city. Without the solar system, the city water would enter the hotel's natural gas-fired boilers at 40 degrees. With the pre-heating provided by the solar panels, however, the water enters the boilers at about 80 degrees. It takes far less energy to heat water from 80 degrees to 110 than 40 to 110. In the summer, when occupancies are higher and the sun is stronger, the solar system is even more efficient.

'On cloudy days in the winter, I am still heating water,' Allinson says. 'For every degree the water is heated above 40 degrees, I am saving money.'

ROI Better Than Expected

When first installing the panels, which were manufactured by EnerWorks Inc., the hotel's owners anticipated a payback period of seven years. Because of rising energy costs and the fact that the system has worked better than expected, the payback time will be just 3.5 years.

'If I were building a new hotel tomorrow, I would incorporate both solar thermal and photovoltaic,' Allinson says. 'If you do not consider alternative energy, you are missing the boat.'

The Confederation Place Hotel is an independent, 30-year-old property that previously was a Howard Johnson franchise. It includes a restaurant and banquet facilities. Allinson's family has owned the property on which the hotel sits since 1949. To complement the solar water heating system, the hotel's owners are currently considering photovoltaics for electricity generation and a solar wall to help reduce heating costs. A solar wall would help to raise the temperature of the air entering the HVAC system by about 30 degrees. That is important during a cold Ontario winter.

In addition to reducing energy consumption at the hotel, Allinson says his staff also has programs in place to reduce kitchen waste. The restaurant has converted to biodegradable corn-silk coffee cups for take-out, a Kingston landscaper collects used kitchen grease to make bio-diesel fuel, and a local farmer trucks away food waste for free.

The Confederation Place Hotel's green initiatives are paying handsome dividends. The property had its best summer in its history in 2007 and two green conferences were held at the hotel.

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