



PHOTO: JON MULDOON

Solar powers up a new Link

by Jon Muldoon

BEACHER ALEX WINCH and Neighbourhood Link/Senior Link have teamed up to build the city of Toronto's largest array of solar panels at a housing complex on Coatsworth Crescent, just east of Monarch Park Collegiate.

When the system, built by Taylor Munro Energy Systems, officially powers up on Nov. 25, the 60 solar panels will provide much of the hot water for the building, at a lower cost to the non-profit agency than that of heating water with natural gas-powered boilers. Winch's Mondial Energy Inc. will still earn a steady profit for the company's shareholders, while the system will eliminate an estimated 40 tonnes of hydrocarbon emissions from the atmosphere each year.

"There's a union here between Neighbourhood Link, an entrepreneur, and investors who want to get a good rate of return," said Winch. "The concept of Mondial is finding that intersection of interests."

The technology used at the Coatsworth building is the same Winch has been promoting for several years at his Queen Street Solar Laundromat, which has earned numerous business and environmental awards from around the world. Winch built the laundromat to prove to potential investors that the technology was workable in the real world, and worth the investment over the long term.

"It's expensive up front, and there's a perception that the technology is risky," he said.

However, Winch's solar setup on Coatsworth cost less than 15% of the photovoltaic solar panel array at the CNE, and since his company owns the panels, there are no capital costs to Neighbourhood Link, and no maintenance or repair costs either. The original gas boilers remain in service, for use when the sunlight is not strong enough to fill the building's total demand for hot water.

"They get this built for free, there's no hook," said Winch.

A comparison between the photovoltaic (electricity-producing) solar setup at the CNE and Mondial's system show as many differences as similarities. While the CNE project removes almost triple the emissions, the system was paid for by taxpayers, at seven times the cost of the Coatsworth project, which was 25% funded by Natural Resources Canada, with Mondial picking up the rest of the tab. The energy generated by the Coatsworth project is estimated at 134,000 kWh per year, while the CNE project is estimated to produce about 120,000 kWh per year in electrical energy.

Winch says the major difference between the two projects is that his will turn a profit, while still lowering heating costs to Neighbourhood Link, and helping out the environment, at no risk to the building owner. He's

Cont'd. on Page 7

hoping to expand the system throughout Toronto, but so far he said the reception at City Hall has been less than welcoming.

"If the people at City Hall could realize that they could lower their energy costs, benefiting taxpayers, with no capital investment; benefiting taxpayers, at no risk to them; benefiting taxpayers, while helping out the environment, benefiting taxpayers, you'd think they'd want to do it," he said.

The Coatsworth project is Mondial's largest in Toronto so far, but another two Beach-area Neighbourhood Link projects are in the early stages. Mondial also has agreements to install systems in San Francisco, Atlanta, Houston, Reno, Aruba and Jamaica. However, it took a local non-profit organization to fully realize the potential of the system.

The first customer for any new idea takes a significant leap of faith, and Senior Link took that leap," said Winch.