

## Shiny solar pennies from heaven

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Devens zero net energy homeowner collects first rebate check

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DEVENS -- As we head into the snowy season, a bright spot was celebrated for a Devens couple who has received their first electricity rebate check. In effect, they've caused their electric meter to spin -- backwards.

It's all thanks to their 7.6 kilowatt roof-mounted solar array. On Halloween 2011, Frank and Yu-Chi Lin closed on their Greek revival styled home on Adams Circle. Two months later, their solar farm atop their 1,950 square foot "zero net energy" home -- consisting of 33 solar panels, each capable of generating 230 watts of power -- was switched online.

Theirs was the first of eight zero net homes sold on Adams Circle. All were built by Transformations of Townsend.

The company has completed dozens of like-minded energy conscious home developments, with several more under construction. The so-called zero net energy homes produce as much energy as they use on an annual basis.

Now, a year later, the Lins received the first of what may be many checks to come. On Dec. 12, Yu-Chi Lin was handed a check for \$575.08 from the Devens utilities department. Despite 10 months of power load - including all plug-in devices, heating and air conditioning - the house produced more power than it consumed.

Hot water is heated via propane, but even taking that expense into account, the Lins realized a savings over the past year - and avoided paying a utility bill for 10 months. The family consists of husband, wife and one teenaged son.

"We wanted to show people that it can work," said MassDevelopment President and CEO Marty Jones, who presented the check to Mrs. Lin. "And it's not just net zero - it's plus!"

"We thought at best it would offset its usage," said Devens utilities supervisor Jim Moore. "But as we saw the bank of kilowatt hours growing, we knew it would go positive." There is a meter

reading the solar production and a separate meter showing what surplus power flows back out of the house and onto the grid.

Surplus energy produced by the Lin family home could be used to charge a hybrid or electric car in the garage, if they had one.

Transformations Development President R. Carter Scott said that all eight homes are spoken for - six have sold and the final two - under construction - are under agreement. Work is to be completed by early spring.

Coming up next -- MassDevelopment is turning its attention to the residential development options for Grant Road on Devens. Requests for proposals have yet to be drafted but Scott said "definitely" his company would be interested in creating similarly designed energy conscious homes.

In nearby Harvard, Transformations is completing work on 24 units of housing. Transformations is working on 33 housing units in Easthampton and was awarded an opportunity to build four housing units in Roxbury as part of the Boston Redevelopment Authority's sustainable development challenge. Mrs. Lin said energy savings and "going green" were on the top of the list when shopping for their Devens home. She also indicated the Harvard school system was a draw. Devens school-aged children are educated in Harvard under contract with MassDevelopment, the state agency developing and managing the former Fort Devens Army lands.

Scott said that comports with feedback he's heard from the other owners in his Devens zero net energy development. "Seven of the eight owners said the schools were their number one or two reason."

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