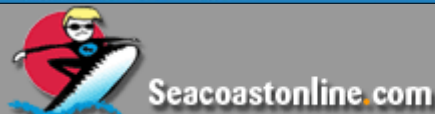


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New breed of solar

By **Joshua Bodwell**
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KENNEBUNK — Thanks to a group of local residents, Maine can now boast that it has the first solar powered State House. A group of donors, made up locally of Jim Murray, Bill Lord, Bill Stepchew, Lisa Barstow and Peter Sargent, bound together to purchase the state a Blue Link solar system. The system was switched on last week in Augusta in honor of Earth Day.

The Blue Link system, which was conceived of by the Solar Market in Arundel, is a small, 500-watt solar electric system. The three-panel system, which stands roughly eight feet by five feet, costs \$4,650 installed and generates roughly ten percent of a home's power.

The citizens group made the donation to the State to encourage legislators to

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pass the renewable energy incentive bill. They called their effort the Maine Solar Citizens Challenge.

“It’s the first ‘plug and play’ solar energy system,” say Solar Market co-founder, Naoto Inoue, of the Blue Link. The user merely plugs the unit into an outside outlet and the electricity begins flowing into the house.



Naoto Inoue, Jim Murray and Charlie Langston display a Blue Link Solar System at the Solar Market. Murray was instrumental in purchasing a Blue Link System for the State House.
 Photo by Kevin A. Byron

“Up to now, the delivery of solar technology has been very inefficient,” Inoue said, “every single unit has been custom made and required a customer to commit upwards of \$15,000.” He said that it just isn’t realistic anymore to sell people on the idea of going 100 percent solar when half of the energy producing day is nighttime.

Since taking office, Governor Baldacci and his administration have made an effort to promote conservation, efficiency and renewable energy in order reduce Maine’s dependence on coal-produced energy. However, local orthodontist Jim Murray has been feeling like, “Our government talks about saving energy, about consumers buying green cars and such, but they never seem to do anything themselves.”

Murray, whose local offices are solar powered (and include radiant heating and efficient compact fluorescent

lighting), was the largest donor to help purchase the State’s new Blue Link.

“He’s actually walking the walk,” Inoue said of Murray.

“Like anything,” Murray continued, talking about the Blue Link, “there’s an initial outlay. But we have to start someplace. If we start using solar now, the unit prices will come down quickly.”

Murray speaks passionately about the shift away from traditional methods of electricity production, such as coal, oil and nuclear power, and towards alternative like solar.



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“What the Blue Link means to the State House,” Murray said, “is that I am planting a shade tree under which I will never sit.” It is Murray’s hope that enough people will begin using the Blue Link option that it will actually shut down coal burning plants.

The Blue Link system works in such a way that as people connect their personal unit to the grid, they all combine to become, in a sense, their own power plant adding clean electricity to the power grid via sunshine.

“If we had 10 million households in the US with Blue Link,” Inoue said, “we could shut down 300 coal burning plants.”

The Blue Link unit is warranted for 25 years but expected to last 75 to 80 years, with less than 20 percent degradation. At today’s electricity rates, the Blue Link pays for itself 10 times over during its lifetime.

With the Blue Link at the State House switched on last week in honor of Earth Day, Inoue and Murray hope that they have started a wave.

“How can we not do this?” Murray said. “You plop the unit in your yard, plug it in and it back-feeds energy to your house. Your meter starts moving backwards!”

For his part, Baldacci accepted the citizen’s challenge, and also switched over his office lights to the more energy efficient compact fluorescents. Baldacci also made a Solar Governor’s Challenge, urging governors across the country to focus more on renewable energy.

The wave Inoue and Murray have hoped for seems to be building: a group in New Hampshire is currently raising money to purchase a Blue Link for its State House.



Governor Baldacci and Alden Coldrek - grandson of The Solar Market's Naoto Inoue - celebrate after "throwing the switch" on the State House's Blue Link System.

Salor Market photo

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