



Staff photo by Joe Phelan

INVERTED: Brian Byrne, a project manager for ReVision Energy, works on a pair of inverters on Wednesday morning at Winthrop High School. The devices take direct current from rooftop photovoltaic panels and convert it to useable alternating current. An EfficiencyMaine grant provided 90 percent of the \$79,000 cost for the project; the town and school split the remainder.

WINTHROP

Town panel lauds solar panels

Green Committee sees cost savings in 84 solar panels

BY BETTY ADAMS
Staff Writer

WINTHROP — Solar panels sprouted atop Winthrop High School this week — another part of the town Green Committee's plan to save energy and money.

On Wednesday, Ryan Herz stepped lightly down the roof, heading for a long yellow ladder.

The project manager for ReVision Energy, of Liberty, needed more parts to hook up the 84 photovoltaic panels on the gently sloping, south-facing school roof.

Herz said the panels, manufactured by Evergreen in Massachusetts, should — 4 percent of the power consumed by the high school.

"Over time, the 4 percent will add up," he said. "As rates increase, you fix a small portion



Staff photo by Joe Phelan

ON THE ROOF: Two arrays of photovoltaic panels atop the Winthrop High School roof are expected to produce an estimated 21,000 kilowatts of energy annually.

of your electrical rate for quite a while."

Each step by Herz was closely monitored by Carl Swanson, a Green Committee member, who sat in his car with a solar shade on the sunny side of the car and a box full of paperwork — including the panel contract — on the passenger-side floor.

"I'm a retired electrician," Swanson said. "That's why I have an interest in this, because it's producing electricity."

Swanson had a sample of the rail and clips used to affix the panels to the roof. He also had photos of just about every piece of hardware. He posted some of the photos on the town's web-

site, www.winthrop.org.

The installation is to be completed today. The panels connect to Central Maine Power Co. power lines, and so will help power the school and — occasionally, during the summer — send energy into the grid.

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Herz and another project manager, Brian Byrne, had been working at the site for several days Wednesday. They began work last week but were cut off by fast-moving thunderstorms.

"Sprinkles and rain are one thing, but thunder and lightning is a whole different thing," Herz said.

Byrne showed the location for the monitoring system, a Sunny WebBox, which will send data over the Internet.

"Students can monitor the

system's production online," he said.

An EfficiencyMaine block grant provided 90 percent of the \$79,000 cost for the photovoltaic work; the town and school split the remainder, each putting in about \$3,900.

"This system will offset roughly 14 tons of carbon each year," according to Jennifer Albee, of ReVision Energy.

Winthrop High School was the fifth panel installation for the company at an educational institution: It also placed an array at Thomas College in Waterville.

The Winthrop photovoltaic array is one of the projects that resulted from studies done by

the town's Green Committee. Another is inside, where vending misers monitor the use of electricity in vending machines.

Swanson said the misers save \$1,200 annually. He estimated the solar panels would reduce the energy bill by about \$3,000 a year.

Swanson said the Green Committee's next project is filling out a grant application for a new, more energy-efficient domestic hot water heater for Winthrop Middle School.

"We'd like to have a town energy manager maybe some day," Swanson said.

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