

“Power to the Solar People”

By Amy Howell Hirt, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Sep. 25, 2010

With financial incentives, sleeker technology and reduced equipment costs, solar power is becoming a more approachable option for average homeowners, and a more common sight in the suburbs.

The 8th annual Ohio Solar Tour next weekend will feature 241 sites, up from 168 last year, including 24 homes and residential developments in Butler, Clermont, Hamilton and Warren counties.

If there were an ad campaign for this new face of solar-powered homes, Michael and Marcia Eason of West Chester Township could be the star example.

Like many homeowners, the Easons, who have four grandchildren, wanted to reduce their impact on the environment. They began lowering their energy consumption through simple changes, such as turning the lights off when they're not in use, transitioning to compact fluorescent bulbs and using a rain barrel.

They bought a hybrid car for the drive to St. Elizabeth Hospital, where they both work. And when they built their single-level home six years ago, a high-efficiency furnace and insulation seemed smart for the environment and their budget.

The couple saw solar panels as the next step for curbing energy use in their home, where they hope to retire, but didn't know much about it.

"We literally went to the library and got *Solar Power Your Home for Dummies*," Marcia says. "They really do have that (book)."

They began working with Carl Adams of SunRock Solar in the spring of 2009, and their 4.8-kilowatt array was installed that July.

While solar panels sometimes are tucked away on a rear-facing side of the house, the square roof over the Easons' garage and triangle-shaped roofline next to it had the ideal orientation and not-too-steep pitch for capturing the most sunlight.

Facing the driveway, the panels' discreet yet visible-from-the-street placement has become an unintentional conversation piece among curious neighbors, family and friends.

They often are surprised, as the Easons were, that the system involves minimal equipment - mainly the photovoltaic panels and an inverter housed in a metal box on a basement wall - and nearly no maintenance.

"They think we have to flip switches on and off or something, but we don't do anything," Marcia says. "You install it and forget it."

Perhaps the most important lesson that visitors can pick up from the Easons, who are participating in the Solar Tour on Saturday, is that solar panels can be downright attractive.

"We have a couple neighbors thinking about doing it, now that they've seen ours," Michael says.