

Bouctouche couple invests in planet

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Auberge Le Vieux Presbytere leverages solar technology for savings

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BOUCTOUCHE - Richard Drennan and Ann Vickers are happy to be spending the holidays in a giving mood.

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Ann Vickers and Richard Drennan show off the roof of their inn in Bouctouche where they have installed solar panels to power their hot water system.

The owners of the Auberge Le Vieux Presbytère in Bouctouche are content to be giving back to the planet, and contributing to their own peace of mind and that of ecologically-concerned visitors.

They recently installed an eight-panel solar hot-water system to serve the needs of guests. Drennan admits that the \$20,000 investment, which will reap about \$1,000 of savings per year, isn't only about the money.

What he is most excited about is that over those same 20 years, their tourist operation won't be consuming the 200,000 Kw of electricity it would have required without the system.

With most of that electricity coming from fossil fuels, Drennan is thrilled to be diminishing the inn's carbon footprint by 120 tons.

"It makes so much sense. It's a cost. Being greener, taking care of the planet that takes care of us costs us some money, but in the end we all win because we aren't killing ourselves by polluting this tiny little planet," said Drennan.

"It's the best gift you can give your children, a greener, cleaner earth."

Drennan said the unit is running smoothly.

"It is a versatile unit, and I enjoy thinking I am not paying needlessly for dirty energy."

The new solar powered hot water system is part of the couple's overall renovation project, which has included added insulation and other improvements geared at making the inn's rooms hospitable all year.

Drennan said he would eventually like to open a dozen of the inn's 18 rooms during the winter months in addition to its regular tourism season. The new hot water system makes that goal possible.

"Before we could it but it wasn't economically viable to do it," he said.

While Drennan insists the impetus behind the new system is a matter of principle, he is also very aware of the growing market of eco-conscious travelers.

"Any kind of survey that is done on tourism these days says there is a growing market for eco tourism," he said.

Because Bouctouche is becoming well-known as an eco-tourism destination, the inn's new initiative fits well into the region's overall strategy.

Drennan said he and Vickers were drawn to Bouctouche from Montreal by the extraordinary natural landscape.

"We moved from Montreal and we were attracted by the absolute beauty of Bouctouche and the surrounding oceans," he said.

Once they arrived, Drennan became a member of the committee that helped elaborate the town's acclaimed green plan.

"That was an added attraction. We had heard that there were some initiatives in terms of environmentally sound practices," he said.

Drennan likes the direction in which he sees Bouctouche moving, but he believes more can be done to market the area as an ecological destination.

"I think it is encouraging, but I am not sure the message has got out very clearly. People come here because of the dunes, the ocean, the Irving Eco-Park, they come here because of the nature," he said.

"I think when people get here they say this is neat that the town is doing this, and I think what it has done is attract more people to Bouctouche."

And Drennan believes Bouctouche can serve as an example to show that small towns can be leaders in sustainability.

"I think Bouctouche wants to continue to preserve this place as a model for what towns can do, and there is more we can do obviously," said Drennan.

"I know of other people who have moved here and part of the reason they are moving in is because of this."

He said there is a sense in the community that everyone has a role to play in creating a greener world, and not just governments and corporations.

"More and more the people in Bouctouche are saying we can recycle, I can compost. I think the only way we turn the world around is not wait for government, but each person does their part," he said.

"It's to say we are part and parcel of the earth and we need to live in harmony and respect with the natural world and everything we share on this tiny planet."

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