

SOLAR ELECTRIC HOUSE

This house in Boone supplies the grid with solar generated electricity

By Jeff Brooks and Renee Whitener

North Carolina's energy supply is a little greener, thanks in part to Boone resident and educator Harvard Ayers and his wife, Mackie Hagaman. The Appalachian State University professor and his wife, who is on the staff of ASU, recently became a supplier of solar energy to the NC GreenPower program, a statewide non-profit program working to develop cleaner, renewable energy options for the state.

The electricity comes from solar photovoltaic panels located on the roof of their home that provide 800 watts of electricity and are emissions-free and generated by sunlight. The energy can be used in their home or added to the statewide electrical grid through an interconnection agreement with their Touchstone Energy cooperative Blue Ridge Electric.

"Harvard and Mackie are our first members to utilize our residential small generation interconnection rate," said Doug Johnson, chief executive officer of Blue Ridge Electric, "and we're pleased NC GreenPower has approved them to be a provider to the statewide renewable energy program." While Blue Ridge sets forth standards for interconnection to ensure safety and power quality, NC GreenPower has full authority to qualify and approve all suppliers to the NC GreenPower program.

The Ayers will receive payments from Blue Ridge Electric for every kilowatt-hour that is sold back to the utility. They will also receive an additional premium from NC GreenPower for each kwh generated. The NC GreenPower premium comes from individuals and businesses across the state who voluntarily elect to make tax-deductible contributions of \$4 or more per month on their utility bill to support renewable energy development in North Carolina. Blue Ridge Electric also participates in this program, allowing members to add on contributions to their monthly bill by signing up online or by calling or coming into their local office. As of early April,

205 Blue Ridge Electric members had signed up for NC GreenPower, and a total of \$24,420 in contributions from these members has been sent by the cooperative to NC GreenPower to help support the development of renewable energy.

TO LEARN MORE

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Harvard Ayers and his wife installed a photovoltaic system at their house in Boone. On occasion the system sends solar-generated electricity into the utility grid. Shown at left is the indoor equipment needed to store and convert the power.

Together, the utility and NC GreenPower payments will help the Ayers household offset the cost of their system.

"Renewable technologies are often higher in cost than traditional resources

despite their cleaner attributes," said Bob Zickefoose, resource manager for NC GreenPower. "One way we can help individuals interested in developing this technology is by providing a per-kilowatt-hour premium to recover some of their costs. Together, with the payment the supplier receives from their utility, it can make a real difference."

North Carolina also offers substantial tax credits for renewable energy additions and energy saving installations. Coupled with tax credits made available in the new federal energy policy act, savings can help defray a significant portion of the investment in these technologies. And homeowners who utilize solar photovoltaic electricity may also be eligible to receive payments from their electric utility and the NC GreenPower program for any electricity that their installation adds to the state's power supply. Ⓢ

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