

# Solar cell idea made firm a star

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PATERSON — About six years ago, Dieter Pfisterer was looking for ways to drum up more business for his roofing company and set it apart from the competition.

"Nobody really cares about roofs," his son, Wayne Pfisterer, said recently. "It's not an exciting thing to market. Unless your roof is leaking, nobody thinks about a roof."

It was around that time that his father chanced upon a magazine article about a company that specializes in solar panels, which convert the sun's energy into electricity.

Then it hit him: Who better to install solar panels on rooftops than someone who has been fixing and installing roofs for about 20 years?

Three years later, Pfisterer has a \$6 million business that specializes in installing solar panels — in addition to his old roofing business, which is still going strong. The new company, Pfister Energy, has been nominated for a state award that honors companies showing "innovation in advancing" the state's clean energy program. The Pfisterers will find out today whether they are the winners of a Clean Energy Leadership Award.

Wayne Pfisterer is president of Pfister Energy, which is in the same building as Pfister Roofing Inc., on East Fifth Street in the Bunker Hill section of the city.

"Anybody can go out and get a solar panel and put it up on a building and plug it in," Wayne Pfisterer said. "But the real [question] is, how are 1,000 solar panels going to work in harmony with your roof for the next 20 years? As roofing contractors, we understood that more than anybody else."



The company's nomination in the Clean Energy Market Innovator category is for a company that puts new clean energy products on the market or reaches new customers, according to the state Board of Public Utilities.

"Most of our competitors focus on one technology," said Wayne Pfisterer, who was born in Paterson but now lives in North Haledon. "We take a holistic approach to basically taking a look at the workings of a commercial or industrial building and seeing a system that could include various technologies to work in harmony to create on-site power or energy-efficiency."

Pfisterer has concentrated mainly on solar panel installation, solar lighting and daylighting. The company has done installations for Valley National Bank in Wayne, Macy's in Jersey City and Danskin Insurance Agency in Wall Township, Pfisterer said. But the company is also looking into wind turbines and other forms of renewable energy.

Renewable energy refers to energy produced from natural sources, such as the sun, water and wind.

New Jersey ranks second in the nation — behind California — in the number of solar installations, said Doyal Siddell, a spokesman for the state Board of Public Utilities.

In seven years, the number of solar installations in the state has soared from six in 2001 to 3,400, Siddell said.

The company plans to stay in Paterson, but is developing partnerships with roofing companies in other states to do work under the Pfisterer name. The company is also bidding for projects in California and Florida, Wayne Pfisterer said.

Pfisterer said that even in the poor economy, he expects businesses to continue investing in renewable energy because it makes sense.

"Companies realize that they are going to have to control costs," Pfisterer said. "And a big, big part of those costs is energy. Even though we are in tight times, they realize that something needs to be done. [This] is a cost they can control."

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