

Student's illuminating project aids school

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Most high school seniors are counting the days until they will get out of school. Ryan Toussaint is counting watts and volts.

Toussaint, a senior at Lahser High School, recently completed a project he spearheaded to bring a photoelectric panel grid to the roof of the building, where it now supplies 20 percent of the lighting for the school's science wing.

It's not a huge amount, but it does produce a savings for the school.

"I had an interest beforehand in alternative energy," Toussaint said. Working with chemistry teacher Jessica Lupone, Toussaint had an opportunity to do an independent study project. He picked a project to install the solar panels. He sketched drawings of what the solar energy system would look like and finalized the concept.

"He came up with the project and executed it," Lupone said. "He did an exceptional job."

The project cost \$12,500 to complete, which gave Toussaint an opportunity to experience another side of the "real world" — raising money. He sought grants and wrote proposals to have the project funded.

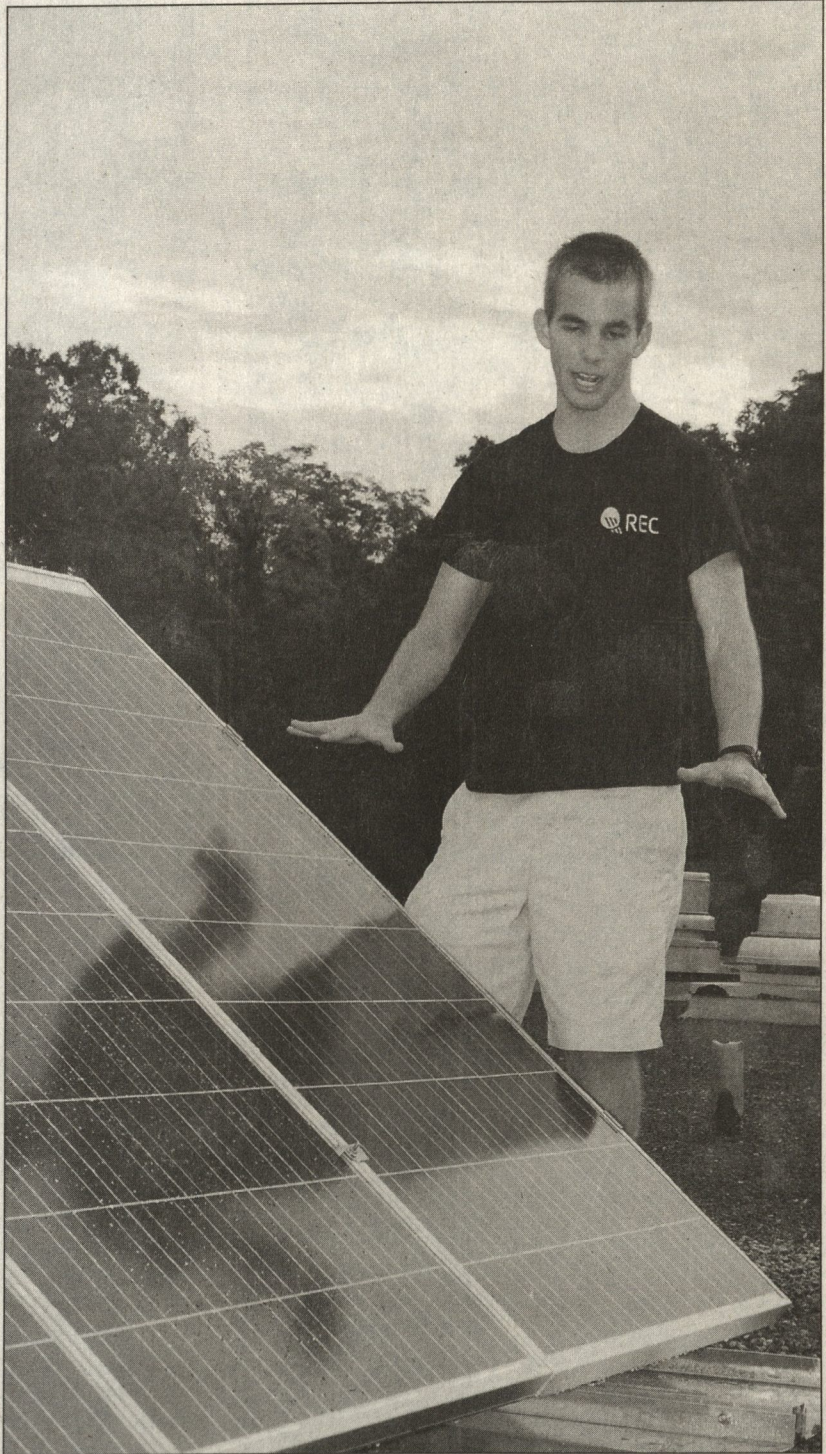
He was successful. The result is six 3-by-5-foot solar panels resting on the roof. Thinking ahead, the panels were put on temporary footings so if and when Lahser is closed and students moved to the new high school the district hopes to build, the panels can be moved with them.

"I helped put it up," Toussaint said. He worked on the roof with the installers.

Toussaint got a lesson in practical science, too. "I was able to see how everything works together," he said. He saw how sunlight produces DC — direct current — which has to be converted to AC — alternating current — to be used in the school. And he learned the other nonscientific elements that go into such a project, including communication skills, leadership and organization.

He already has some experience with that. Toussaint is senior class president and is involved in cross country. He plans to go to college and study engineering.

And as for this project, he said, "It was fun."



Student Ryan Toussaint checks out the solar panels he had installed on the roof of Lahser High School.