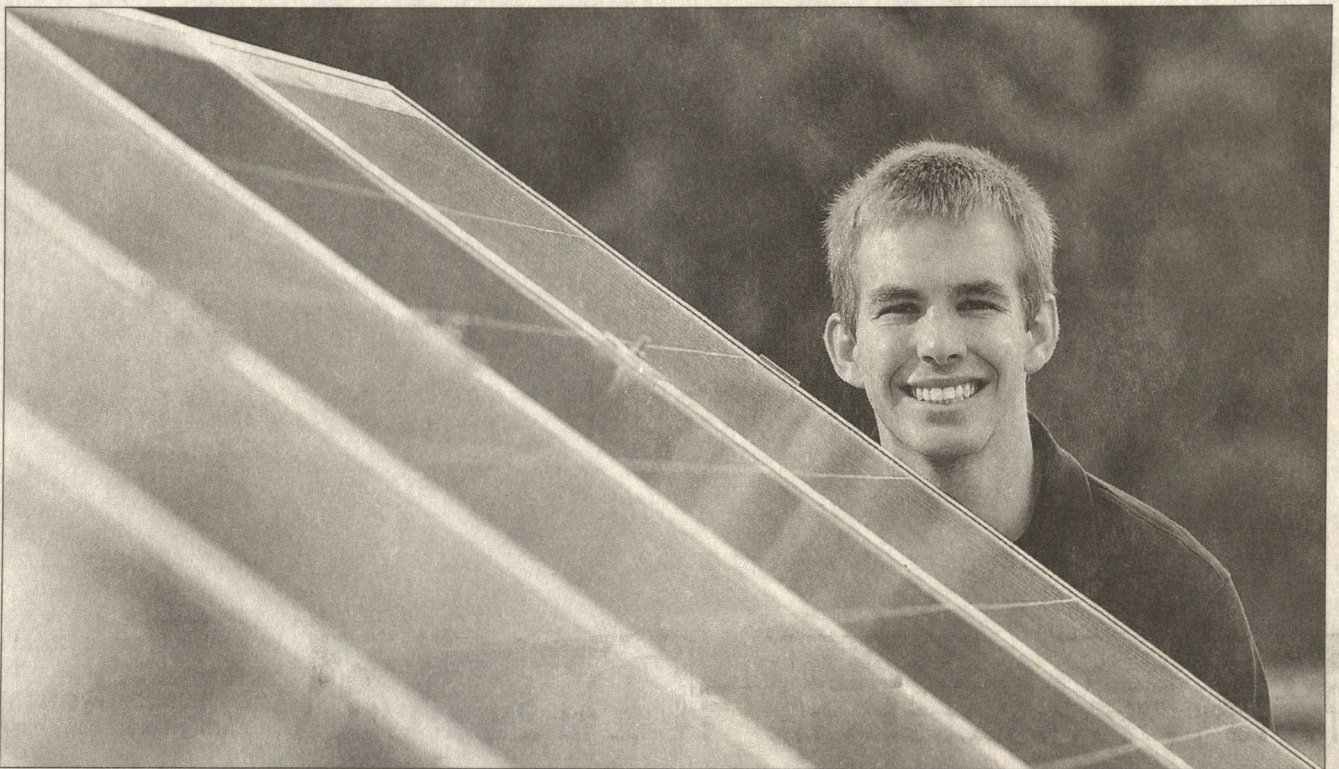


SCIENCE PROJECT TAKEN TO NEW HEIGHTS



Bryan Mitchell / Special to The Detroit News

Lahser High School senior Ryan Toussaint stands in front of the solar panels he designed for his semester-long independent study course.

SOLAR ENERGY GRID GETS HIGH MARKS

BY SHAWN D. LEWIS | The Detroit News

Bloomfield Hills

Never mind a 12-page report or unwieldy display. Ryan Toussaint's science project is on the roof of Lahser High School.

The high school senior selected solar energy as his semester-long independent study exercise and designed a grid of six photovoltaic panels now installed on the school's science wing roof that could eventually supply 20 percent of the wing's lighting.

"It's something I've always been interested in and I plan to study it in college," said Toussaint, 18. "I ultimately want to go into electrical or computer engineering."

Lahser High is a "green" school, and Toussaint said the panels help make the school even greener.

"I wanted to raise awareness about alternative energy, and get more people involved," the teen said.

Charlie Hollerith, principal of the school, said the district isn't sure how much energy the student's project will save "since all the monitoring equipment is not yet in-

stalled." He called Toussaint's leadership an inspiration to the entire school.

"Ryan has done incredible work researching, preparing and organizing this great green project," he said. "He will make not only a great engineer some day, but more importantly, a great leader."

Hollerith said Lahser is recognized as an Emerald Green school by the state for its level of participation in environmentally friendly and energy-saving activities.

"Ryan's solar project is a great example of Lahser's commitment to be environmentally conscious," the principal said.

"Ryan's efforts have certainly led the way for us to expand alternative forms of energy at all our school buildings."

Toussaint began his project in January by researching types of renewable energy. He sketched drawings illustrating how the solar energy system would look, and figured it would cost about \$12,500.

"Michigan CAT, the Caterpillar dealer covering the lower peninsula of Michigan, stepped forward and told me in February that if I wanted to make my drawing and idea a reality, it would cover all the costs," Toussaint said. "I am very grateful to them."

Renewable Energy Corp. supplied the solar panels.

Toussaint said if the materials and installation hadn't been donated, the solar grid would have qualified for state incentives and utility credits that would have covered much of its cost over time.

He said the panels, which were installed in August and span 5 feet by 18 feet, receive sunlight for slightly more than four hours a day over the course of a year, producing the most power in the summer.

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