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Sunday June 03, 2007

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CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/ CHRIS McLEAN

Dean Lloyd recently installed solar panels on the roof of his building in Mesa Junction, which has housed Ambrosia Natural Foods for more than 10 years. Lloyd is making the building entirely 'green.'

Solar panels generate profits, ward off heat

By JAMES AMOS
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Aquila is looking for a few good solar panels, and will pay you a little if you have one.

The electrical utility company has started a rebate program for people in the Aquila service area who can supply solar power or the energy credit created by having a renewable energy source.

Kenny Romero, Aquila manager of renewable energy, said the program stems from a legislative measure, Amendment 37, that Colorado voters approved in 2004. The legislation requires utility companies to provide a certain amount of their power from renewable sources.

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**CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/
JOHN JAQUES**

These new solar panels at CSU-Pueblo will be used to provide energy to the university's technology building.

For Aquila, the solar requirement in 2008 is 5 percent, Romero said. By 2020, that requirement will rise to 20 percent of all power provided.

So Aquila wants to partner with people and businesses that have, or will install, solar electricity panels, he said.

"We want to create awareness of the program," Romero said. "We're working pretty hard to spread the word."

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The rebate program works like this: Aquila will pay the owners of solar panels a rebate of \$4.50 a watt, Romero said. The rebates average about 45 percent of the cost of a system.



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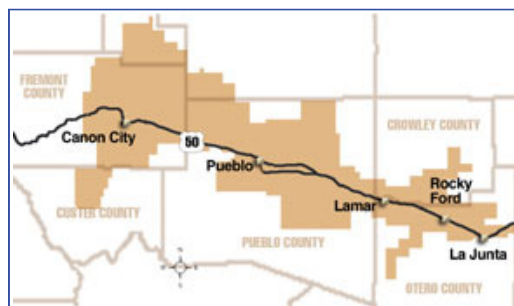
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The electric utility also will buy power from people or businesses that generate it with solar power if they have a surplus of electricity.

"The customer gets a lower bill," Romero said, because they aren't buying electricity from Aquila when the panel is working, "and when the sun is shining, that meter is going backwards."

Aquila also wants to find people in the company's service area who aren't connected to power lines and use solar power for their needs. The utility can buy renewable energy credits, at \$2.50 a watt, from those off-grid people, which also helps Aquila meet its legal requirement.



The Aquila service area.

Aquila's service area extends from Westcliffe to Cripple Creek to the west and along the Arkansas River through Canon City and Pueblo to Rocky Ford. The program started modestly in July 2006, according to Romero, and has paid out approximately \$272,000 in rebates and tax-credit purchases to about 61 system owners. Most were tax-credit purchases, which Aquila also calls rebates, and 19 were rebates to existing Aquila customers.

The solar requirement is part of Aquila's overall requirement to purchase or create energy from renewable sources, Romero said.

Of the 3 percent renewable power the utility must have in 2007, 4 percent of that must be from solar energy and one-half of that 4 percent must come from photo-voltaic panels mounted on houses and businesses.

The amendment also allows utilities to use wind, water, biomass, geothermal and other renewable sources.



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/MIKE SWEENEY

Pueblo homeowner Ray Catulli is participating in Aquila's solar-power rebate program.

Romero said wind energy has become affordable in recent years because of the proliferation of wind farms. But solar energy remains expensive, requiring efforts such as the rebate programs

Aquila burns wood chips at its Canon City power plant, a use of biomass energy, and plans soon to burn biodiesel at the Rocky Ford plant.

For more information about the program, call Romero at 546-6534 or see Aquila's information Web page at <http://pv.aquilaprograms.com/> .

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