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SEA Solar Store completes 9-panel array for restaurant

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Three months after the Portsmouth Historic District Commission's decision to allow a solar hot water array atop Jumpin Jay's Fish Caf , the restaurant can now boast the largest solar system in the city's downtown.

The new 9-panel array and accompanying 330-gallon tank - the first commercial application of the technology anywhere in the city - were officially put online two weeks ago and, according to installer Jack Bingham of SEA Solar Store, the system is already surpassing expectations.

Coupled with a high efficiency propane hot water system - also supplied by SEA - Bingham expects the new solar array to generate upwards of a 56% annual savings for Jumpin' Jay's.

That could translate to as much as \$30,000 over 20 years. Coupled with an additional \$15,000 in incentives, that adds up to quite the payback, Bingham noted.

Customers who join Green Alliance - a local union of 95 green businesses of which SEA was a cornerstone member - can get an additional \$250 off.

"It was a cloudy day when we turned it on, but by the end of the first sunny day, the water tank had gone from 50 degrees to 140 degrees, which is pretty incredible," Bingham said. "It certainly bodes well as far as future payback is concerned."

Bingham said that the energy savings from the new system could help shorten the pay-back period to seven or eight year - far faster than is typically expected for one of this size and makeup.

What's more, the panels are built to withstand the kind of sustained winds the region recently experienced during Hurricane Irene - no small thing for a region not exactly immune to such events.

While the system is already paying some immediate dividends, it was by no stretch of the imagination Bingham's most seamless installation. Before getting the green light, Bingham and McSharry had to first receive approval from the Historic District Commission.

The Commission's chief concern: That the roof-mounted panels would be a visual eyesore along the heavily-frequented section of Congress St. Fortunately, Bingham was able to place the panels in such a way as to hide the panels as much as possible.

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