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Building code change gives local manufacturer a boost



Gerald Van Decker, chief executive officer of Renewability Energy Inc., poses with one of the company's drain water heat recovery systems.

Philip Walker/Record staff

KITCHENER — A local company that manufactures drain water heat recovery units hopes to grow now that Ontario has become the first jurisdiction in North America to include the systems as an option in the energy-savings part of the province's building code.

It is a “win-win-win” for everybody, said Gerald Van Decker, founder and chief executive of Renewability Energy, a company that manufactures the units in part of the former MTD plant on Ottawa Street in Kitchener.

Renewability makes a “Power-Pipe” product that takes heat that people will normally send down the drain and uses it to warm up incoming cold water, saving money on water heating bills.

Typically, it gets installed in new homes, but the units are also sold through Home Depot or Sears to people who want to retrofit existing homes. Businesses and industries that use a lot of hot water also install them.

The company was started in 2000 out of Van Decker's home office in Ottawa and moved to Kitchener in 2003. It currently employs 20 people who are making the units that are exported all over the world.

The plan is to grow the company to about 35 people by this time next year. Getting the technical changes to the Ontario building code will help that growth, Van Decker said.

Ontario mandates that new homes must have a certain level of built-in energy savings. The building code allows builders to pick and choose from various items, such as better windows, a higher level of insulation, or other items that will give builders the credits they need to meet those requirements. Now, drain water heat recovery has been added to the list.

For Renewability, it has been a long time in coming. Last year, the company held a news conference to express frustration over the bureaucratic slowness in getting the changes made. But on Friday, it was able to celebrate victory at an event attended by building industry representatives, as well as provincial and local politicians.

For builders, it is a cost-effective way of getting energy credits. That makes homes more affordable, while saving homeowners six to 10 per cent on heating costs, Van Decker said.

Van Decker said the company is selling units in Europe and other countries, as well as North America. It is now sells 7,000 to 10,000 a year. "We will be setting up a base in Europe soon," he says.

He thanked the province for its leadership. "This is really a springboard for the rest of North America," Van Decker said.

Kitchener Centre MPP John Milloy said Renewability "is a great success story in Waterloo Region." Inside a plant that had previously shut down, "we now have an international manufacturing company that is growing."

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