

Manitobans warm to geothermal

By JOYANNE PURSAGA, SUN MEDIA

Outside it may still feel like winter but Manitobans are leading the nation in a new wave of indoor heat. Steve Klassen is one of many to choose a geothermal heating and cooling system for his new home. "For me, No. 1 is the health of my family," said Klassen. "The geothermal system does not produce dust because it doesn't burn the air to heat it up. It's a gentler heat with a very constant temperature." The system will be installed in Klassen's new home, being built in the North Kildonan area. Klassen said its reduced greenhouse gas emissions and high energy bill savings were key incentives. He said early projections show he'll spend just \$600 per year to heat and cool his new home compared with a \$300 February energy bill for his current one. The number of geothermal heating system installations in Manitoba rose to a milestone 5,000 this spring, says Energy Minister Jim Rondeau.

LEADS CONTINENT - Manitoba's per-capita rate of installations leads the continent with 745 new heat pumps installed in 2005 alone, according to Manitoba Hydro. Rondeau said Manitoba has 3.6% of the national population but accounts for 50% of the country's geothermal installers and 20-25% of installations. Because of our climate, this pays," said Rondeau. Rondeau said his home geothermal system cost \$9,000 more than a conventional system in 2001 but has already paid for itself in energy savings. Plenty of Winnipeggers appear to agree with him. "We are as busy as we can handle," said Deborah Holmberg, one of four owners of installer Winnipeg Geothermal. A geothermal heat pump works by moving heat in or out of the earth using pipes or wells to heat or cool a home, while a refrigeration process multiplies the energy produced, said Holmberg. This week's provincial budget raised Manitoba Hydro loans to install such systems from \$15,000 to \$20,000 and offered a reduced 4.9% fixed interest rate for the first five years of borrowing to offset the cost of installations and further sweeten the deal. Brent Laufer, president of the Manitoba Geothermal Energy Alliance, estimates upfront costs for a geothermal system are about \$10,000 higher than that of a high quality gas furnace and air-conditioner. Manitoba Hydro estimates switching to the ground-based heat source from an electric furnace or baseboard heat would reduce an average family of four's heating bill from about \$1,100 a year to \$450.



Steve Klassen with some of his new geothermal tubes. (C. PROCAYLO/SUN MEDIA)

Hydro estimates geothermal heat can save homeowners 50% to 70% on annual heating costs.

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