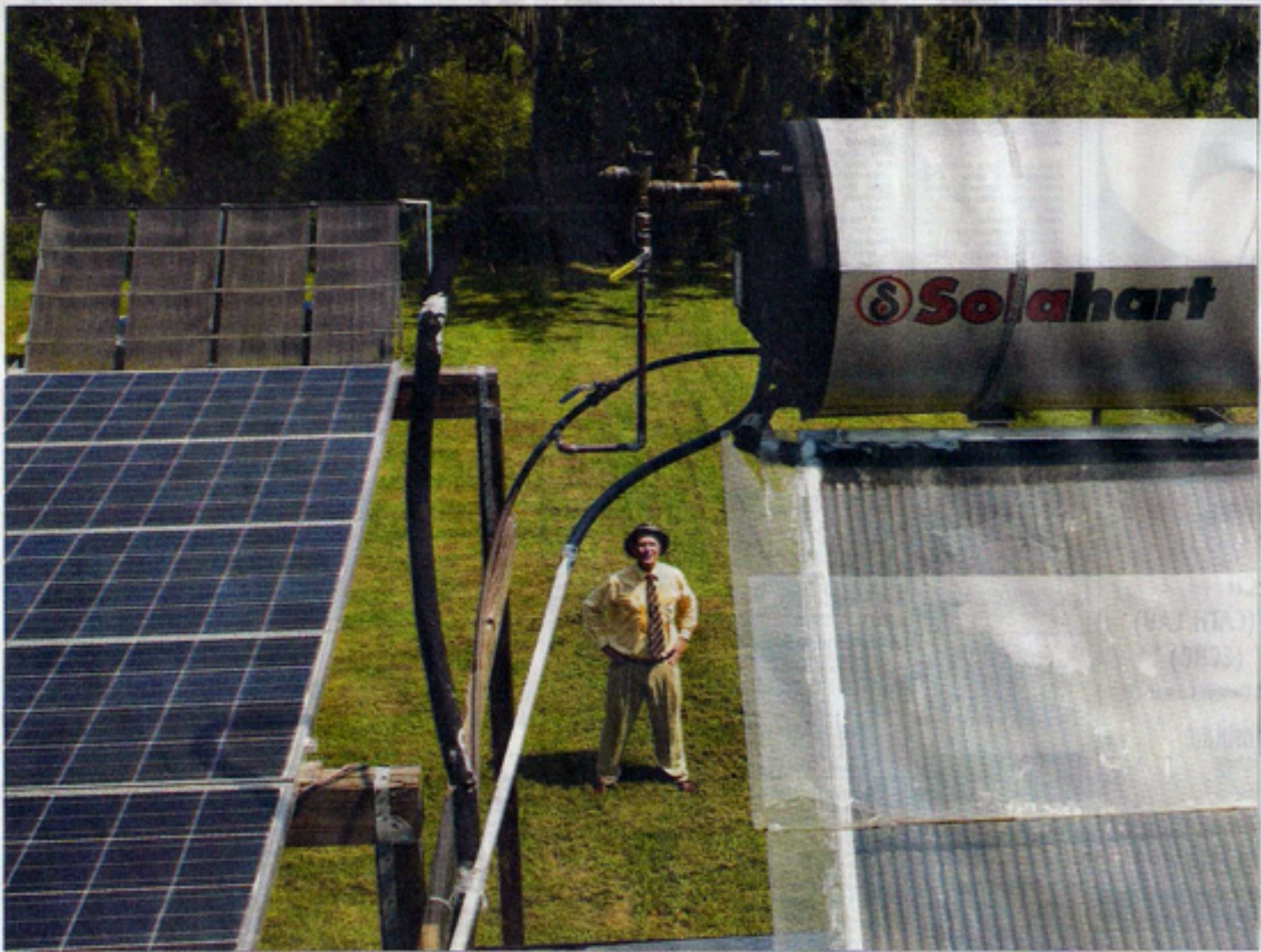


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Earth-friendly commerce catches on



DANIEL WALLACE | Times

Lawyer Ralph Fisher runs a side business selling solar hot water heaters. His Lutz home has an 80-gallon unit, at right on the roof, with a solar array and hot tub heater on the ground. He says a family of four can save about \$100 a month over an electric water heater.

Ralph Fisher, Lutz, TaxCreditSolar.com

RALPH FISHER, a lawyer and accountant, didn't need a third occupation. But then the 2006 Florida Energy Act came along, and he heard opportunity knocking.

Among other things, the energy act offers homeowners rebates of up to \$500 for installing solar thermal systems. The federal government and some energy companies offer incentives, too. Fisher, 51, who had built a solar hot water system for the house he lived in as an undergraduate at the University of Florida, figured he could do it again. So he launched TaxCreditSolar.com.

A family of four, he estimates, will pay \$6,700 for a solar hot water heater before rebates, and then save \$100 a month on electricity.

But even a system that pays for itself can be a tough sell if the audience is environmentally apathetic. "Most people don't even think about their hot water until it starts leaking," Fisher said. "They don't even know that it runs on electricity."

"What I want to find is this 1 percent of people who have an interest in this already."

"Most people don't even think about their hot water until it starts leaking. They don't even know that it runs on electricity."

Ralph Fisher