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A HUNTERDON HOME GOES HYDROGEN; HOUSE IS FIRST TO BE ALL SOLAR POWERED

By Leonard N. Fleming,
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EAST AMWELL, N.J. - Some thought he was crazy and would blow himself up in failure. But Michael Strizki was determined to someday operate his home in rural Hunterdon County on hydrogen created by the sun.

Yesterday, in a rain-soaked moment of triumph with nearly 100 supporters on his multi-acre property, Strizki made history when his two-story home became the first in the nation to be powered solely by solar and hydrogen energy.

The intricate, \$500,000 Hopewell Project - Strizki's home - was almost five years in the making. Strizki cultivated private and corporate support and cajoled state utilities officials into embracing the idea that renewable energy must be the way of the future, to cut down on pollution.

Still, Strizki encountered critics who thought his idea of using solar electricity to extract hydrogen from water was dangerous. Building code officials, he added, weren't prepared for the technology he championed.

"Things that people don't understand, they're afraid of," Strizki said. "Hydrogen is just another gas, and it's safer than all the fossil fuels we currently know."

Now it's Strizki, a married father of three, who is doing the lecturing. He was to appear last night on ABC World News Tonight to talk about his home and has admirers across the country.

"I said, 'I'm not waiting anymore. We're going to work through the existing code, and I'm going to drag them kicking and screaming, but we're going to do it.' And we did," he said. "I convinced enough people to be believers, and the ones I couldn't convince, other people helped me move them aside."

Strizki and many others now believe that hydrogen, a colorless, odorless gas used by NASA for space shuttle fuel, will become more accepted as a home energy source. Researchers also are studying hydrogen as a pollution-free automotive fuel.

Strizki's home has solar panels lining the garage roof. During the summer, those panels generate excess electricity, which is harnessed to extract hydrogen from water. That hydrogen is pumped into 10 tanks on his property and is used to power a fuel cell, which generates electricity to supplement the solar panels in the cooler months.

Now he enjoys his big-screen television, his swimming pool, his hot tub, and the other comforts of his home - all powered by hydrogen and the sun.

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Stritzki was a state Department of Transportation engineer when he became interested in hydrogen technology. He has built cars, a golf cart, a boat, and an airplane that use hydrogen.

"New Jersey has shown the will, the leadership to the rest of the country, and it's up to them to catch up because we're in the vanguard," said Lyle K. Rawlings, president of Advanced Solar Products and a design engineer for Stritzki's home. "This is a vision shared by many of us."

Connie O. Hughes, a commissioner on the state Board of Public Utilities, praised Stritzki as a "modern-day pioneer."

"We're not anticipating this exact project to be duplicated everywhere," Hughes said. "But we do see this as one of the ways to address New Jersey's goals of having 20 percent of our energy coming from renewables by the year 2020."

Hughes said the state utilities board provided \$250,000 for the project as part of its Clean Energy Program that encourages renewable energy sources to fuel homes and businesses.

Stritzki put \$100,000 of his own money into the project. Other funding came from loans and private and corporate sponsors.

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