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Funds give local startup a sunny future

■ Investment helps Solar Sentry make devices for energy projects.

DAVID TYLER
STAFF WRITER

A Pittsford startup company is dreaming of becoming a key player in the solar energy industry and recently received the funding to help it start down that path.

Solar Sentry Corp., which makes monitoring equipment for solar panels, says it has closed on \$770,000 in financing and

hopes to secure about \$500,000 more. The investment group that ponied up the funds is led by Bradford Energy LLC, an investment firm in Buffalo.

Solar Sentry's products determine whether a solar panel is operating at peak efficiency or having problems. They can wirelessly report on the condition of individual panels. That can be a big time and money

saver for operators trying to locate a problem at a massive solar energy farm, said Gordon E. Presher Jr., a co-founder of the company with Carlton J. Warren.

"It can be like trying to find that one bulb on your string of Christmas lights that has gone out," he said of current search methods. "You have to search the whole string."

The monitors can help prevent problems and increase output, he said.

Solar Sentry plans to use

the financing for product development, sales and marketing efforts and installations at two demonstration sites.

Solar Sentry's vice president of sales, Tom Currie, said the company could grow from its three founders to 50 people over five years. Marketing and installation efforts should ramp up later this year and early next.

The company believes it is entering the market at an opportune time as oil prices and global warming

concerns boost the demand for so-called "clean tech."

New tax credits in California and the Canadian province of Ontario are also fostering solar development, Presher said.

The photovoltaic solar power market is nearing \$10 billion annually, meaning there's a sizable opportunity for Solar Sentry's offerings, the company said.

The company connected with one of the investors after making a presentation at a Digital Rochester En-

trepreneurs & Angels event in 2006, Currie said.

Digital Rochester Vice President Juli Klie said she thinks the company has a smart strategy.

"Solar Sentry was selected to present at Entrepreneurs & Angels because their business plan showed a deep understanding of a growing industry, a clear differentiator with their self-diagnostic monitoring products and a credible plan for reaching their target market," she said. □

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