



## *News Release*

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## **Century Offers New Solar Program**

Andy Richardson of Oakdale is thrilled to be among the first students to enroll in Century College's new solar energy program.

Richardson, who lost his job at Anderson Windows in 2008, is using his state dislocated worker benefits to learn how to install solar panels on homes and businesses. He said this is exactly the kind of work he wants to do, and he is happy that Century has started to offer both credit courses and non-credit workshops for people who want to become energy technicians.

"I've always been interested in taking things apart and putting them back together, so this is perfect for me," said Richardson, a 2003 graduate of North High School in North St. Paul. "I'm fascinated with learning how people can heat their homes and garages using some basic materials."

Richardson said the principles he learned in Introduction to Solar Assessment taught him how to study the feasibility of solar heating and electric projects by performing solar site assessments. And his Solar

Energy Construction Projects class taught him basic construction skills and mounting methods used in solar air, water and electric systems.

After high school graduation, Richardson held a number of jobs including sprinkler system installer, home improvement store worker and electronics store clerk. He also has tinted windows and rust-proofed cars.

“Being a solar installer or a site assessor would be my dream job,” said Richardson. “I lose track of time when I am doing this work. For my classes, I tend to come early and stay late. I spend weekends working on projects.”

Century College solar instructor Todd Fink said a Department of Labor grant helped Century get the solar energy program off the ground. The college offers courses leading to a two-year degree in renewable energy or a shorter term certificate in solar installation and maintenance and also site assessment. In addition, community members can sign up for continuing education workshops on solar water heating.

Fink said at his own home, he has five solar collectors that heat the water for his home for about 15 cents a day. “It’s not so much about saving money as it is saving the future,” said Fink. “When we use solar heat, we are not using fossil fuels.”

Fink said the growth in renewable energy and energy efficiency is expected to generate millions of jobs across the country in the next 20 years. In addition to solar installation jobs, solar sales, marketing and education is expected to be a big part of the job growth in the near future.

“Providing unbiased information about what solar can do and how much it costs, and informing customers about the status of rebates and incentives is critical,” said Fink. “The Century program gives a rich background for people to advise, educate and sell within the solar industry.”

If you are interested in power generation and would like to enter a high-growth job field, the U.S. Department of Labor is offering scholarships for a number of different energy-related

community college programs around the State. Covering about half of the tuition, these scholarships can be used for two-year Associates Degrees or certificates that can be completed in one semester.

Century College offers the solar energy classes for the schools involved in this program, and students can earn a 16-credit Solar Site Assessor Certificate, a 30-credit Solar Installation and Maintenance Certificate or a two-year Energy Technical Specialist Degree. Other participating schools offer wind, biofuels, nuclear, and conventional electricity. Students can take coursework at Century, but some programs require on-line coursework.

If you would like to apply for the scholarship, please call [Carol Hegna](#) at the Minnesota Energy Enterprise Center, Minnesota West Community and Technical College, 1-800-657-3247.

For more information on Century's solar credit courses and certificates, contact [Todd Fink](#) at 651-747-4042.