

Solar thermal swimming pool heaters growing business

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As solar gains in popularity, it's drawing attention to one historically logical solar application – solar swimming pool heating.

Solar Living, a New Jersey company, started installing solar hot water heaters in 1977 and quickly discovered there was a market for solar swimming pool heaters.

The founder developed his own solar hot water system specifically for swimming pools. He realized he could save on the cost of the systems by building them without insulation because they were used seasonally in the summer.

Ethan Horvitz, Solar Living president, said the company has installed 1,500 to 2,000 solar swimming pool heaters in the last 25 years and supports almost 3,000 solar swimming pool heaters in New Jersey.

The company has been busy in the last five years and typically installs 150 to 200 systems a year. "Once the trend of solar in general started taking off and getting more popular, people started to think of it more," he said.

As solar has become more mainstream, people think of solar thermal heaters right away when they think of installing a pool heating system, Horvitz said. His customers are all kinds of pool owners. Maybe their pools weren't heated at all before or maybe their old heater went out or maybe they got sick of paying for natural gas.

A solar swimming pool heater has a steeper price tag at face value, Horvitz said. A gas swimming pool heater costs about \$1,500 and then another \$1,000 to \$3,000 to run the gas lines if they aren't already in place. That's a total of about \$4,000 for a traditional gas pool heating system.

A solar swimming pool heater costs \$4,000 to \$6,000 to install. "But then you don't have any other costs after that," he said.

Solar Living is a solar thermal company and it does install solar hot water systems for all purposes. Horvitz said pools make up about two-thirds of his business. He is finding some customers coming back and asking for full solar systems after realizing the benefits from their pool heaters, he said. "It's a pretty easy transition," he said. "But the amount of appropriately oriented roof space is always the limiting factor."