



Solar Unlimited President George Chambers stands in front of his Lewes home.

# Meet Lewes' solar power 'peddler'

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You might recognize him as that solar energy guy Gov. Jack Markell mentioned during his final State of the State address.

But George Chambers, the 70-year-old president of Lewes-based Solar Unlimited, is not your typical renewable energy industry representative.

Chambers was an example of Markell's "expecting more" rhetoric, a group of various individuals who were still driven even as the state suffered through an economic downturn after 2007.

Among the recent college graduates and heroic military personnel, Markell pointed to Chambers' ventures in Mexico, where his dealings in hot water systems with a focus on renewable energy have garnered significant interest from the country's hospitals.

Chambers currently makes his living in the solar energy field. His goal is to sell businesses on the idea that solar energy powered electricity and water heaters will save them on their annual costs.

But he's no environmentalist.

"I'm no tree hugger," Chambers said.

Rather, he calls himself a "peddler," and is proud of the term. He joked about his early business ventures, selling life insurance plans to military squad mates after he graduated from college and joined the U.S. Army.

"I was a squad leader in basic training, so I had all my little guys in my squad all signed up in life insurance policies," Chambers said. "And I get this call from the (life insurance) general agent after we'd done all this and he said 'We're not allowed to do this. We got to give all their money back.'"

But that's the kind of guy Chambers is. He speaks loudly and with conviction and, when he was sold on the profitability of solar powered and renewable energy at a Dover Downs business expo in the mid-2000s, he was all in.

He called solar water heaters a "little known secret" of the renewable energy sector. The move away from more conventional, pressurized water heaters is one both NASA and the U.S. Army both mandate, according to Chambers.

But the way he pitches its importance to him is that it's all about the "bennies," better known as benefits he sees from state and federal government for being in the renewable energy field.

If you've driven through Ocean City, you've probably seen at least one of his projects. On top of Macky's Bayside Bar and Grille lies a 32-solar panel project of his, something he said he sold to the owners based on the savings in annual cost on their original water heater.

He said that's in large part due to the fact he can sell business owners on various tax breaks and state funding the projects are eligible for.

As for the \$1 million in exports Markell claimed in his speech, Chambers said he currently working with five hospitals to develop solar water heating systems and the "bennies" are to be had there too.

"One of the hospitals, that is the government hospital, is the largest, not only in Mexico, but even in Central America," Chambers said.

"The country mandates they have a renewable energy plan for any new construction they do," he added. "I know they're under the gun for renewable energy. And one of the things that makes our presentation so attractive to them is we're dealing with current heating equipment that is obsolete. I mean, the efficiency is down the toilet."

So it's marriage of "win-win" propositions. Chambers gets hold of government-funded projects while the country works toward its quota on renewable energy projects.

It's a long way away from selling life insurance to military men and he said even at 70 years old, he's far from stopping.

As for what's kept him in the industry?

"It's the thrill of the hunt," Chambers said.