

# Energy firm closes, workers left in cold

By Mario Chestney  
staff writer

A meeting in Atlanta today will determine whether nine employees of a just-closed solar energy company in Livonia will get paid for the last week they worked for the firm.

The company — Home Energy Co., 14800 Farmington — also is facing court action initiated by Daniel Potter, a Farmington public safety officer.

Potter claims the firm never applied for a city permit to install \$6,000 worth of solar panels to his home. Potter said the permit is essential in order to apply for a 1985 federal tax credit for installing the panels. The permit costs about \$215, he said.

The nine employees, residents of Redford Township, Westland and Livonia, have all filed complaints with the hourly wage division of the Department of Labor, saying they were not paid for the last week they worked for the company, said Redford Township resident Lucy Essa.

ESSA WAS one of nine persons employed by Home Energy Co., a division of Creative Construction Co. in Orchard Lake, when it closed its doors in Livonia on Jan. 20.

"Two hours before going to work I got a call," Essa said. "They told me

the company had folded. They owe me \$225 for salary and commissions. The workers have been calling ever since. They said they'd let us know when we would get paid. Since then, we've been getting the run-around."

The company's normal payday, Jan. 23, came and went without paychecks going out to employees, said Chester Mays, who was employed as an assistant manager of the phone room when

the company closed its doors.

"Checks started bouncing around Christmas," Mays said. "They owe me \$237. Altogether, there's about \$2,000 owed the nine employees."

JAMES STRIPLIN, senior vice president of Creative Construction, said the Canadian owner of the company would decide at its Atlanta offices today "what to do with the company" and when to pay its ex-employees.

"Checks will go out this week or the week after," he said.

Public Act 390 mandates that firms that go out of business pay wages to employees on their next normal pay day, said Larry Mynhier of the Detroit labor department's hourly wage division.

"Beyond that, it's a violation of the act," Mynhier said. "If they don't pay, they're in it to the state legal staff. But if they're out of business, there's often difficulty in collecting."

STRIPLIN blamed the closing of Home Energy Co. on recently enacted legislation which did away with federal solar energy tax credits at the end of 1985.

"That crunched us," Striplin said. "We thought it was going to stay in but they (legislators) chopped it out. It just knocked the industry on its tail end and stopped us flat."

Striplin said Home Energy Co. might opt for involuntary bankruptcy under Chapter 7.

Meanwhile, Potter of Farmington has threatened to take Home Energy to 47th District Court to get the company to apply and pay for a permit to put in the panels, which he said were installed at the end of November.

"I've heard all kinds of stories from

them," Potter said. "They said they would put the permit right away. Now I just got a call from someone in their Atlanta office saying they can't afford the \$215."

Striplin said the Atlanta operations were "doing well" in the sale of solar panels because of the higher cost of energy in the south.

POTTER criticized the company for stressing the tax credit in its sales pitch and then failing to get the necessary permit, which serves as proof that the panels were installed.

Thomas Centofanti, owner of Livonia-based Sun Hawk Solar Heating Co., agreed the solar industry was reeling from the loss of the federal tax credit.

"A lot of businesses opened up in the last six-eight months to take advantage of the credits," he said. "They oversold solar, because the credit is a heck of a deal. But any business which can't pay its employees shouldn't be in business. They should have the financial ability to pay their help whether the credits are there or not."

ESSA said operations at the Farmington Road offices were two-fold: telephone sales and solar seminars.

Using a Bressler's directory, Essa said, employees manning a bank of phones called homeowners, asking them to attend free energy seminars at the Farmington Road office.

The homeowners, she said, were promised a \$20 certificate from a grocery store if they came to the seminar and met certain financial conditions.

Homeowners attending the seminars were shown ways to lower their gas bills. They were also given demonstrations of solar panels, she said.

## Hills begins road safety program

By Joanna Maliszowski  
staff writer

It's called a safety program. And Farmington Hills officials are hoping it will be successful in keeping abreast with the need for safety improvements on local roads.

With the help of the traffic safety division of the Farmington Hills Police Department, other city departments, and complaints and concerns from residents, traffic engineer Kevin McCarthy has compiled a list of 41 road projects proposed for the 1988-89 safety improvement program.

In order to complete as many of the

projects as possible, city officials placed a limit of \$30,000 on projects to be considered eligible for the safety program. The projects that exceed this amount would most likely be considered as independent projects at budget time in the spring. Some of the projects are also located on county roads. City officials plan to identify the projects and forward them to the Oakland County Road Commission.

The city presently has approximately \$75,000 in its Act 51 (gas and weight tax) fund that is expected to be used for the road safety program, said Thomas Blaisell, director of public services.

Because city officials are also planning a construction program for improvements along major roads — 13 and 14 Mile and Drake — that could include additional money, the plan is to include this safety program under a major financial package for road improvements that will be presented to the city council later this winter, Blaisell said.

How many of the more than 40 proposed projects will be completed in the coming year will be determined later when city officials have developed a financing plan for road improvements.

Blaisell said.

To determine in what order the projects should be completed, a rating system was developed. The system focused on two major items — accidents and accident history, and the potential a proposed improvement would have for preventing future accidents.

Listed projects that are expected to cost \$30,000 or less include, extending a passing lane on Oak Point at 13 Mile; extending a lane drop on Greening at 13 Mile; improving sight clearance and installing time signal on Nine Mile at Halsted; paving the gap on 11 Mile, Killreigh to Beech; adding a passing lane on 13 Mile at Chesterbrook; improving sight clearance and signs on 14 Mile at Inkster; installing advance warning lights on 11 Mile at Halsted; installation of flashing signal at 14 Mile and Drake; adding passing lane on Nine Mile at Treadwell; installing advance warning lights on Drake curves; paving approaches on Raphael at 10 Mile and Farmington at Raphael; installation of traffic signal on Eight Mile at Gill; paving approach on Glen Orchard at Farmington; installation of active warning lights at William Grace Elementary; eliminate standing water on

Bunker Hill at 12 Mile; installation of flashing signal on 14 Mile at Halsted; installation of traffic signal lighting on Nine Mile at Drake; addition of passing lanes on Hyston at Inkster and 14 Mile at Briarcrest; installing guardrail on 10 Mile, west of Inkster, and the Howard Road curve; installation of signals at North Farmington High School, on Hills Tech at Halsted, and 11 Mile at Powers; elimination of standing water on Nine Mile at Freedom; signs and lighting on Power at Cadillac; a cut-through traffic Pearl and Eight Mile/Grand River; installation of guardrail on Freedom at Orchard Lake and Grand River; paving approach on Argonne at Farmington.

Projects estimated to cost more than \$30,000 include: addition of passing lane on 13 Mile at Fox Grove and 14 Mile and Heather Heath; addition of southbound right-turn lane on 13 Mile at Inkster; guardrail at Freedom/Drake to Halsted; improving the alignment on Shilwaukee at Nine Mile; improvements on 14 Mile curve; extending the lane drop on Greening at 13 Mile; and improvements on Eadyth-Milton at 13 Mile.

## on the agenda

Farmington City Council  
Council Chambers  
23600 Liberty, Farmington  
8 p.m., Monday, Feb. 3

A public hearing on the proposed Downtown Development Authority for Farmington is scheduled first on the agenda, followed by a presentation on downtown by city planner Christopher Wozny. An ordinance may be introduced authorizing adoption of the DDA. Also considered by the council will be reports from City Manager Robert DeJman regarding a preliminary plan for Orchard Lake Road widening, the transfer of an Arbor Drug liquor license, and purchase of radar devices for the Department of Public Safety. Scheduled for adoption is a massage business ordinance, a sister ordinance to others adopted at the last council meeting.

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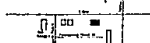
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( ) 321 Fri. 1-4 p.m. 2/14-3/7  
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**Advanced LOTUS 1-2-3**  
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• creating, editing and printing documents  
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