

Students make solar collector

It's amazing what you can do with a little help from a friend.

A group of students at Churchill High School in Livonia put their heads together last September to come up with a solution to the energy crisis. Their solution, a solar energy collector, is now getting its finishing touches in the physics department at the school.

It's no toy either—the collector will soon be put to use heating water for an entire household. And the builders are optimistic that it will be able to take on an even greater share of the household's energy needs.

Dr. Richard Braun, head of the physics department at Churchill, has been guiding the students along throughout their ambitious project, but he says the original idea, design and construction was done by them.

"We did a tremendous amount of research, and as far as we know the design is unique," Braun said.

THE COLLECTOR is encased in a four-foot by eight-foot cabinet. Underneath its glass cover are rows of metal reflectors angled to catch the maximum amount of rays from the sun. The collector directs the rays onto 360 feet of copper tubing. The tubing is heated, warming the water flowing through it.

"The water may even

reach the boiling point. We're going to put a thermostat on the collector so we can monitor the temperature," Braun says.

That means plenty of hot water for baths, dishes, clothes, and maybe even boiling water to hook up to a generator that could provide enough energy for every appliance in the house.

"We figure there will be a two-to-12 degree Fahrenheit temperature rise per square foot of solar area," Braun said. The 32-square foot collector has the potential of heating water up to 384 degrees above its original temperature. Because the boiling point of water is 212 degrees Fahrenheit, there are a lot of interesting possibilities for use of the collector with a generator.

Each student put about 100 hours of work into the collector, known around the school as the CHASER project (for Churchill High Applied Solar Energy Research.)

Many students contributed their own special skills to the project.

The students have offered to send anyone who sends a request to Churchill High School with a self-addressed, stamped envelope a copy of the plans.

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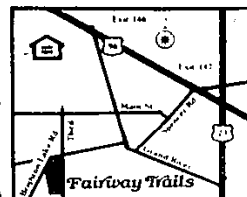
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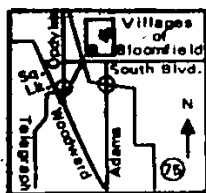
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