

# Mainebiz



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Ten people  
shaping the  
future  
of Maine's  
economy



DANIEL COREY  
BEN DOBSON  
SHANNON HAINES

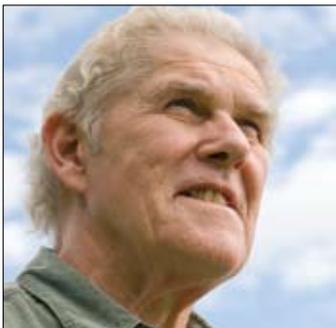


SCOTT COWGER  
NICOLE WITHERBEE  
TARREN BRAGDON



SCOTT R.C. LEVY  
MATT JACOBSON

DAVE TOMM  
PERRY NEWMAN



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## SCOTT COWGER

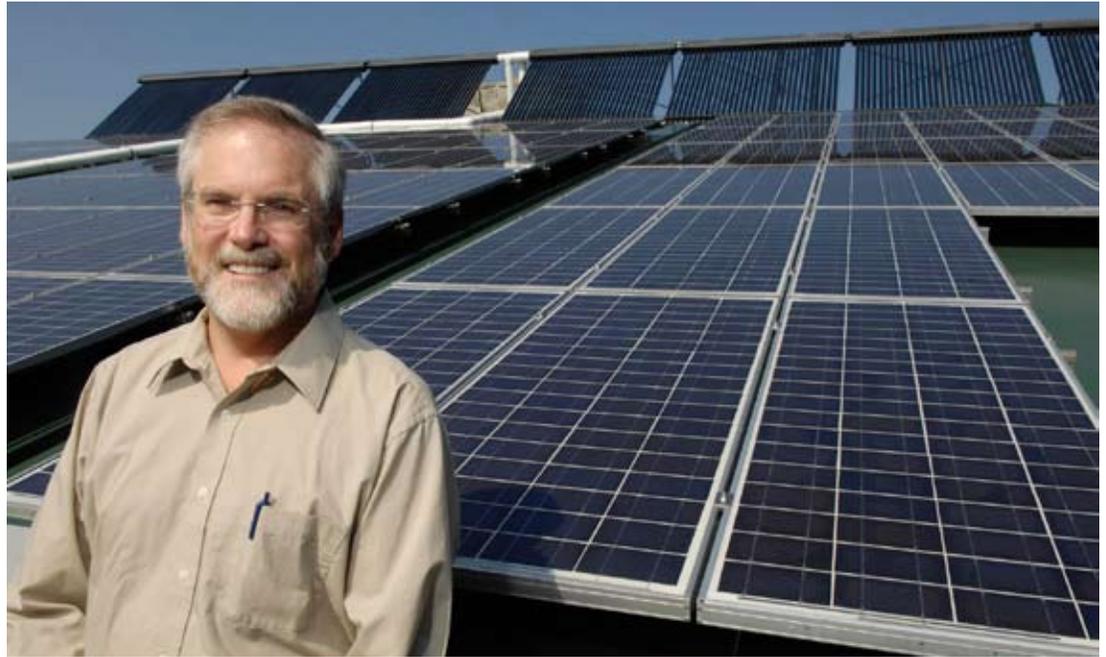
Co-owner of the Maple Hill Farm Inn and Conference Center,  
Hallowell

# Local energy

Guests arriving at the Maple Hill Farm Inn in Hallowell drive up a long, curving driveway, past woolly sheep and high-necked llamas in grassy pens, before pulling up in front of the converted farmhouse. Once they step inside, they're greeted with a warm hello by inn owner Scott Cowger, who after a few pleasantries habitually launches into a quick lesson on alternative energy.

The timeless, pastoral feel of the early 20th-century inn, set amid 130 acres of fields and woods, is juxtaposed by the massive wind and solar technologies Cowger has installed on the property over the past five years. A 100-foot wind turbine sits atop a knoll 1,000 feet away from the inn, easily visible from the parking lot, its wings rotating with languorous grace. And 126 shining, cobalt-blue solar panels cover the slanted south-facing roof of the inn's conference center. "Every guest that comes in, we have an educational moment," Cowger says.

Cowger, a 48-year old former civil engineer, and his business and personal partner, Vince Hannan, made a risky decision five years ago to invest in the then-largely untested field of alternative energy. Today, the two live in a world where alternative energy is on the frontlines of economic policy, and their inn and attached conference center are reaping the benefits of going all early. Maple Hill Farm Inn derives about half its power from wind turbines and a collection of solar panels that Cowger claims is the largest in the state, and some 2,000 of its 18,000 guests and conference attendees a year come to the inn because of its green policies. (Maple Hill Farm Inn was awarded the first-ever Green Lodging Inn Certification from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection in 2005.) Maple Hill Farm Inn has prevented more than 22,572 pounds of carbon from being released into the atmosphere since the inn began measuring its alt-energy production in October 2007. "I'm very proud of what we've done here," says Cowger, who has directed the green



PHOTO/DAVID A. RODGERS

effort at Maple Hill Farm Inn, "and guests are fascinated by alternative energy these days."

Interest in Maple Hill Farm Inn's green policies extend beyond its guest list: Cowger frequently fields phone calls from neighbors and business owners asking for advice on what they can do to offset their power bills. "I'd love to see someone surpass me. I'd be delighted not to be the largest [solar electric] system in Maine," Cowger explains. And Cowger would keep adding panels if he had more space on his roof, he says. He is quick to chide big box stores, with their huge roofs perfect for solar paneling, for not adopting more renewable energy systems. "If I, as a small business owner, can do it and it's good for the environment and good for the bottom line, larger companies should step up," he says.

The inn brings in annual revenues of about \$800,000 and its total investment in renewable energy systems has been more than \$230,000. Cowger saves \$1,000 a month in electricity costs and has reduced the inn's oil consumption by about 20%. He anticipates the \$70,000 turbine—which does not produce as much energy as he had hoped because of weak local gusts—

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**"We have a social responsibility.**

**We can have successful careers and businesses, but we can't sacrifice our social responsibility."**

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will pay for itself in 25 to 30 years. The \$166,000 solar panel array, which produced about 16,000 kilowatt hours in the past year, will pay for itself in a decade, Cowger calculates. In 2006, the Maple Hill Farm Inn also received a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for \$41,500 to use toward the solar panel installation, as well as a 30% federal tax credit.

"We live in a beautiful world," Cowger says. "We need to make a personal commitment to protecting the environment and improving it because humans have devastated it for some time."

*Rebecca Goldfine*