



BUSINESS BEAT

Moves, news and views from our business community

WITH DAVE CAIRNS



Ridin' the solar coaster

SUNNIER DAYS: Velocity Solar owner Brad Ott is navigating the challenges of the new solar panel rebate system.
Picture: DAVID SMITH

DAVE CAIRNS

GEELONG company Velocity Solar has come in from the cold after the end of a 10-week freeze on a Government incentive program that drives the solar panel installation industry.

In an industry familiar to the ups and downs associated with government interventions, the freeze that forced some companies to lay off staff officially ended with the launch of the Solar Homes program on July 1.

However, the “solar coaster”, as Velocity Solar owner Brad Ott says the fluctuating fortunes of the industry are known, is not completely over as challenges remain in navigating the new program that involves the approval of a limited number of rebates every month.

The monthly allocations are a key feature of a \$1.24 billion State Government program that will see solar panels installed on 650,000 Victorian homes over 10 years.

A 10-year veteran of the solar panel installation industry, Mr Ott said that when the freeze was unexpectedly announced in late April, he had thought his Grovedale business had enough work on the books to last his team of 15 for six to eight weeks.

“(But) we found that 12 of our clients hadn’t done the paperwork, so all of a sudden we had only four weeks’ worth of work in front of us,” he said.

“That was supposed to last us until

June 31, and it didn’t. We scraped through April, we scraped through May, and we took a huge hit during June.”

Mr Ott said that keeping his team employed through the challenging time had been a priority, rather than enforcing leave without pay.

It also meant it was critical for Velocity Solar clients to be towards the front of the queue for the Government’s shotgun start to the new program on July 1, when the first batch of

3333 rebates were offered on a first come, first served basis.

Mr Ott said his business held a “Rebate Rendezvous”, helping to step clients, mostly pre or post retirees, through the application process.

Accompanied by higher standards of accreditation for solar retailers and other customer-focused improvements, the program offers rebates up to \$2225.

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