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## **Beware Of Unscrupulous Energy Providers**

Last week we got a card in the mail offering us a free delicious dinner for two at Tofanelli's restaurant in Grass Valley. To say it caught my eye would be an understatement, as that's one of my favorite restaurants!

The next thing that caught my eye was "There is nothing to buy at the dinner, so leave your checkbook at home! This is an exciting and fun presentation on Reducing Your Need For Utilities" ! Being in the business of reducing peoples utility bills I scanned the card to see who was putting on this affair, but the name of the company was conspicuously absent. Hmm, I thought, that's kind of strange. Why wouldn't the company list their name? Maybe so people couldn't do a little research on them before deciding if this free dinner was a good idea or not?

So I did a little research and learned that the company hosting this dinner is called Solartek. Next I did a Google search to learn more about them. As I typed "Solartek" Google's search engine auto-filled in for me the added word "reviews" and "complaints". After spending about 15 minutes more time I learned, in brief, that this is a company I would strongly advise people against doing business with. Try it yourself – just type "Solartek Reviews" or "Solartek Complaints" into Google and see what pops up. Yikes!

The list of complaints about this company were many. While they sell several technologies near and dear to my heart (like solar power) they also sell several technologies that are known ripoffs; like a "power saver" device that's supposed to save up to 30% on your energy bill but is a complete scam. I've written about that one in the past here in Going Green. They also market a "radiant barrier" they lay down on your attic floor – another bad energy-saving idea but one, like the "power saver" device, I've written about avoiding in the past, and explained why.

That old saying "If it sounds too good to be true it probably is" came to mind. And then I started thinking of the many seniors I read about in the paper every day that are targeted by scammers! My first thought was to go down and protest in front of Tofanelli's the two nights they were hosting free dinners there, but I decided against it. It just wasn't something I felt comfortable doing. But what else could I do? I did post a comment about the dinner on Tofanelli's facebook page but I doubt very many people saw that.

So, I thought, what else could I do? Then it occurred to me that maybe the best thing to do would be to write about the subject of energy-related scammers in general. These folks aren't the first and probably won't be the last to try and scam some sweet elderly couple out of money for some over-priced, under-delivered energy-saving thing or another. But ultimately the best solution is for all of us to be extra vigilant in protecting the unwary. We should recommend that people don't sign any contracts or write any checks until they've performed due diligence and researched the company or the product.

When it comes to solar energy, for example, it never ceases to amaze me how many people will talk to just one company and get just one bid. So many solar companies will (routinely) dramatically overprice their wares if they think you're not going to get another bid. I run into this all the time; people get a "cold call" from a solar sales person (that should be their first warning), they get a slick presentation, then they get pressured into signing a contract right then and there or – gasp - they'll risk losing out on some great one-time deal!

So if you know of anyone that attended this too-good-to-be-true free dinner, please warn them. And, in general, if you should ever come across an energy-saving technology that you're wondering about, feel free to send me an email and ask me what I think. It's up to all of us to help prevent unscrupulous people from ripping off our friends, neighbors and senior citizens!

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