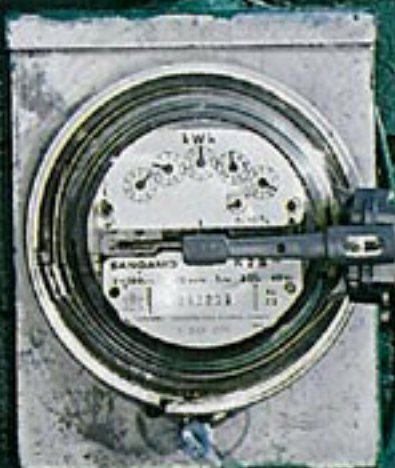
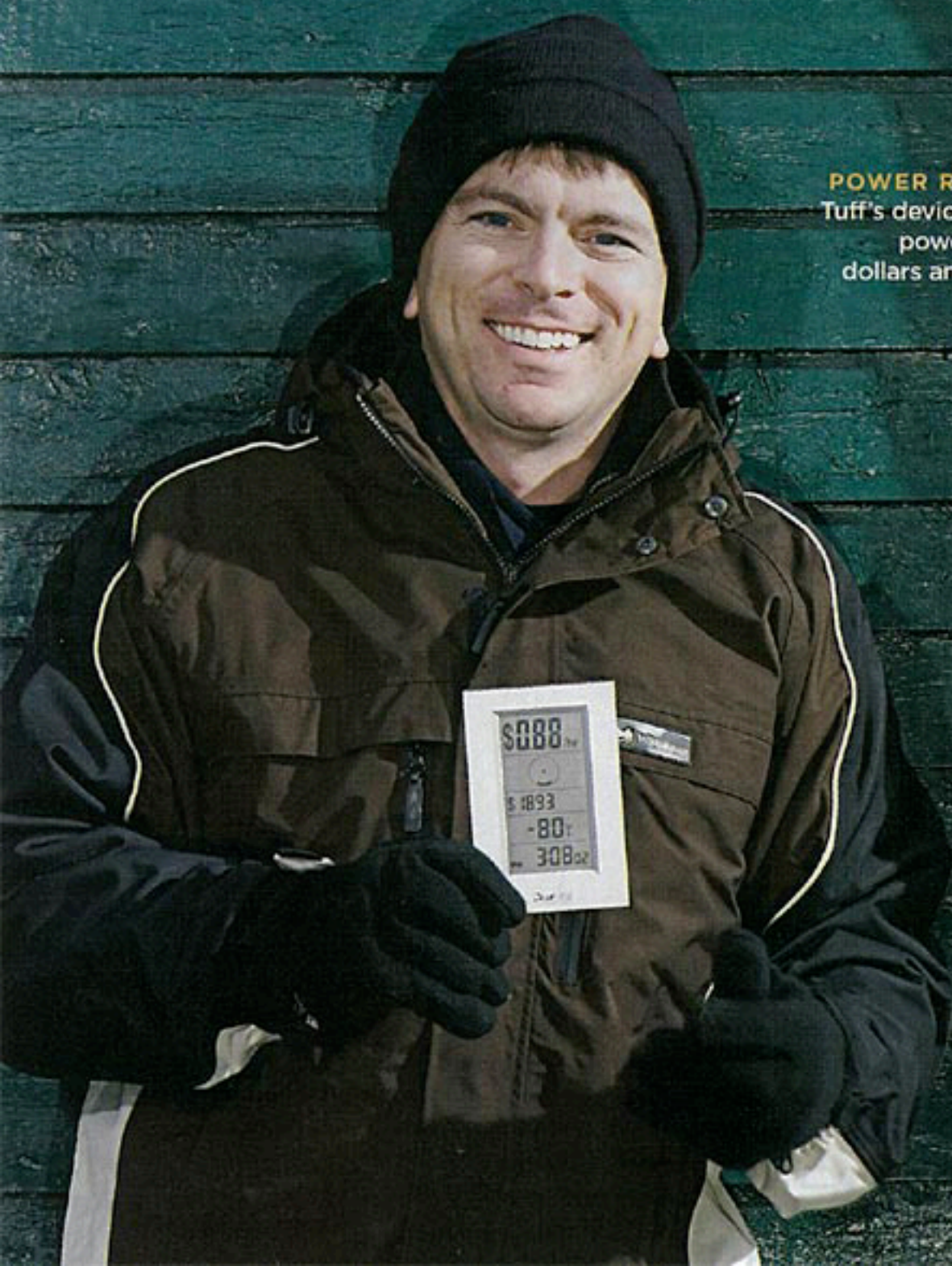


The Gadget That Watches Your Energy Bill

With help from a curious cat, **Blue Line Innovations** found a way to make people more aware of how much electricity they use.

POWER RANGER
Tuff's device shows power use in dollars and cents.



The Problem

When Danny Tuff was growing up in Newfoundland, Canada, his father often prodded him and his siblings to switch off the lights and turn down the heat. If only there were a way to plainly show how electricity translated into real money, his father used to say, people would waste less. Years later, Danny and his brother Maurice launched Blue Line Innovations and chose a home meter reader as one of their first projects.

The "Aha!"

"We wanted a device that any customer could install without the help of an electrician," Danny says. But technical hurdles seemed too high. Then one afternoon, after Maurice's cat had been chasing the dot from his laser pointer, Maurice shot a beam through the bottom of a power meter. Could that be the answer? After modifying the idea to use low-power infrared instead of a laser to track a mark on the meter's spinning disk, they dropped other projects and raised \$4 million in financing.

The Payoff

The brothers presented their Power-Cost Monitor to Ontario utility Hydro One, which found during a test that newly alert customers used an average of 6.5 percent less electricity. Hydro One bought 30,000 units, netting Blue Line a cool \$4 million. Now at least 50 more utilities, including Nstar in Massachusetts, are eyeing the device, which is cheaper and easier to install than technologies that let people track power usage online. In the end, it seems Dad was right—electricity can indeed translate into real money. — SIRI SCHUBERT