

Going green, saving green

A Portland nonprofit offers energy-efficiency rebates for homes in Central Oregon

By Jordan Novet / *The Bulletin*

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A Portland nonprofit has expanded its one-stop energy-efficiency financing shop to Central Oregon.

Clean Energy Works Oregon, established in 2010, has already rolled out its program in the Portland area, as well as Jackson, Josephine, Klamath and Lake counties.

Now stimulus-funded instant rebates and loans from Roseburg-based Umpqua Bank with interest rates as low as 5.5 percent are available to qualified homeowners in Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties with single-family homes built before 1993.

Between now and May 15, if energy-efficiency improvements result in savings of 30 percent or more, homeowners can receive \$3,700 in rebates. After that, the compensation will likely drop to \$2,000, as the nonprofit wants to use its money efficiently, CEO Derek Smith said.

The program's arrival in the region is the latest development in a yearslong effort to lower the cost for Central Oregonians to make energy-efficiency improvements at home.

At a news conference at a northeast Bend house Wednesday, Cylvia Hayes, of Bend, Gov. John Kitzhaber's partner, touted the program.

"Clean Energy Works is a triple-bottom-line win — it saves money, it protects the environment, and it provides opportunities for people in need," said Hayes, CEO of the Bend consulting company 3Estrategies.

Earlier, technicians from Bend-based contractor Green Savers USA Inc. had insulated the house's attic and installed a high-efficiency gas furnace, said Green Savers' owner, Robert Hamerly.



Photos by Rob Kerr / The Bulletin

Green Savers Energy Efficiency expert Dave Bowman takes a reading Tuesday in a customer's home in Bend. A tool containing artificial smoke identifies the severity of a draft from a bathroom vent.



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“We really appreciate what was done for our house, and our pocketbooks,” said Mike Martin, who lives in the house with his wife, Juanita.

The work doesn’t come for free, but it does cost less than it ordinarily would.

If the price of the work comes out to, say, \$13,250 — that’s the average of all the nonprofit’s projects, plus a \$500 home assessment — and energy savings exceed 30 percent, a homeowner will get \$3,700 in instant rebates. A no-money-down loan from Umpqua covers the remaining \$9,650.

But, because customers need to be able to qualify for the loans, the Clean Energy Works deal isn’t a one-size-fits-all program.

“This is probably not a program for low-income families,” said Mike Riley, executive director of the Environmental Center in Bend, which is promoting the Clean Energy Works program.

Last April, Bend-based contractor Sunlight Solar Energy began a partnership with San Francisco solar-financing company SunRun Inc. that enables customers to reap the benefits of solar panels at home while not owning them outright.

Instead, after customers pay \$6,000 up front — or in \$1,500 annual chunks — they can keep the equipment around for 20 years, although it belongs to SunRun.

Since the establishment of the program, SunRun and Sunlight Solar have installed about 100 solar-electric systems, mostly in Central Oregon, said Sunlight Solar’s president, Paul Israel.

Customers need a suitable credit score to qualify for the Sunlight Solar and SunRun program, Israel said.

“We’re talking a middle-income sort of credit score,” he said. “However, it’s only \$6,000 down. So a lot of folks can put that on a credit card.”

For lower-income people, weatherization has been available from the Redmond-based nonprofit NeighborImpact.



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In 2010 and 2011, it completed 292 weatherization projects, most funded by federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars, said Emily Quaka, the organization's weatherization and home rehabilitation manager.

Contractors have largely weatherized low-income people's homes, at no cost to them, Quaka said.

"Everybody's serving a little bit of a different population, just so we can serve everybody out there," she said.

The Portland nonprofit Energy Trust of Oregon pays people in Oregon and Washington for a wide variety of residential energy-efficiency projects, from air and duct leakage tests to solar water-heating system installations.

Peter West, Energy Trust's director of energy programs, acknowledged at Wednesday's press event that last year Clean Energy Works performed at least 600 "deep retrofits," or jobs resulting in upward of 30 percent energy savings — right on par with Energy Trust.

"You've taken what we've done and doubled it," he said.

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LEFT: Bowman uses red plastic, a fan and sensors to help him analyze air leaks in buildings. ABOVE: Identifying a draft inside a customer's home can help determine how best to make the building more energy-efficient.

Learn more

- Application instructions for the Clean Energy Works Oregon program are online at <http://cleanenergyworksoregon.org>.
- More information on the SunRun and Sunlight Solar Energy programs can be found at <http://sunlightsolar.com/residential/rebate- programs-or/oregon-sunrun-program>.
- A brochure containing Energy Trust of Oregon all cash incentives available to Oregonians is posted at http://energytrust.org/library/forms/HES_DOC_Incentive_Grid.
- NeighborImpact describes its weatherization program at http://www.neighborimpact.org/home_wx.html.

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