



For Immediate Release
October 19, 2009

\$2.7 million for Energy Efficiency Awarded Locally

New 'Community Energy Challenge' program will help reduce utility bills, create jobs

Opportunity Council, in partnership with Sustainable Connections, was recently awarded a \$2.7 million grant through the U.S. State Department of Energy and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The grant will establish the Community Energy Challenge, an initiative designed to create jobs, increase energy efficiency, and reduce utility bills for homeowners and small business owners throughout Whatcom County.

The two-year pilot program will provide a comprehensive One Stop Shop to help customers with energy information, site energy audits, building and equipment retrofits, utility rebates and tax credits, financing through a revolving loan program, and contractor services. The project will generate approximately 35 local jobs and provide training to contractors interested in becoming certified in weatherization and energy efficiency retrofit work.

The Community Energy Challenge is slated to launch in January of 2010 and will include a public outreach and education campaign that will encourage local homeowners and small business owners to participate in the program.

Shawn Collins, Community Energy Challenge Manager, said the Opportunity Council is ideally situated to implement this new program that expects to serve 1,800 residences and 150 businesses in Whatcom County in the next two years.

"The Opportunity Council has been providing weatherization services in the community for more than 20 years, and has a wealth of expertise in the field," Collins said.

The multi-million dollar award was one of eight Community Energy Efficiency Pilot Program grants distributed through the Washington State University Extension Energy program. The funds will build on additional support for the Community Energy Challenge provided by the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, Puget Sound Energy and Cascade Natural Gas.

Sustainable Connections is non-profit membership organization of 650+ northwest Washington business and community leaders working to transform and model an economy built on sustainable practices. Sustainable Connections was a lead partner in the 2006-2007 Green Power Community Challenge, which led to Bellingham's recognition as the number one EPA certified Green Power Community in the nation.

The Opportunity Council is a private, non-profit community action agency that acts as a catalyst for positive change, both in the community and in the lives of the people it serves. The organization offers a broad scope of services that range from addressing immediate and crisis-oriented needs to longer-term programs that promote self-sufficiency in our community.

For more information visit: www.sustainableconnections.org/energy/energychallenge

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Contact Information:

Shawn Collins
Community Energy Challenge Manager
Opportunity Council
shawn_collins@oppco.org
360-739-6625

Alex Ramel
Policy and Energy Manager
Sustainable Connections
alex@sconnect.org
360-647-7093 ext. 112