

Ferndale Record Journal

Conserving energy becomes a community effort

By Stephanie Plumb

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Sustainable Connections program offers incentives to ‘Go Green’

FERNDALE — You may have seen the orange and purple signs around town proclaiming “Community Energy Challenge: This home is conserving energy.” These signs mark a residence or business that has undergone an energy efficiency assessment and retrofit to reduce its energy usage. Perhaps they inspire you to assess and retrofit on your own establishment, or perhaps they simply remind you to take your phone charger out of the wall between uses. But what exactly is the Community Energy Challenge?

“To quote County Executive Pete Kremen, the Community Energy Challenge is a win/win/win,” said Alex Ramel, energy and policy manager of Sustainable Connections. “It makes comfort and money savings possible for residents, creates a better economy and job market for contractors, and helps rid the planet of pollution and gas emissions.”

Made possible by a grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Community Energy Challenge has been offered to Whatcom County by Sustainable Connections and The Opportunity Council of Bellingham since 2009. It is a program that provides participating establishments with an energy assessment, action plan, rebate help, financing opportunities, recommendations on professional contractors and access to quality information and resources.

Since the time it began, the Community Energy Challenge has completed 375 home energy assessments and 130 home retrofit projects. The average savings for residential retrofits is \$300 per year while the average energy savings in business retrofits is \$580 per year.

Ferndale has wasted no time becoming involved, with 14 private residences receiving energy assessments and local businesses Samuel’s Furniture, Moles Greenacres, Harmonic Design Inc., Samson Rope, Anderson Paper & Packaging and Sullivan Plumbing participating in the commercial program. Three Ferndale-based contractors — Abbott Construction, Rainshield Roofing & Construction, and Smith Mechanical — are certified to perform “green renovations” for people or businesses that want to participate. Rainshield Roofing and Construction is in the process of renovating a historic Bellingham home, and owner Chuck Elashkar said the education he and his men received has proven invaluable to their business.

“It was eye-opening to see first-hand how a two-inch hole in the attic could lead to hundreds of dollars a month lost in heating bills,” Elashkar said. “It gave us a new understanding of air movement through a structure.”

Rainshield staff went through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's program on lead-safe certified renovations and the Building Performance Center's combustion safety, door diagnostic and air sealing certification in order to perform energy conservation retrofits to homes and businesses. About 20 renovations have been performed in four years.

“It's added a leg to our company for revenue and diversity in projects. Sustainable Connections is doing a lot to educate the county,” he said.

Local Ferndale business Moles Funeral Services has taken on the Community Energy Challenge and is currently being retrofitted for low-energy lighting.

“Between the lighting retrofit, the natural gas crematory and the insulated pipes, we'll come out saving about \$1,700 a year,” said Brian Flowers of Moles. “It's not very time-consuming — the contractor works around our schedules — and I would recommend it to anyone.”

Mayor Gary Jensen has signed both his home and his business, Sullivan Plumbing, up for the Community Energy Challenge. Ferndale is also home to the first residential loan recipient for Sustainable Connections, Richard Iserman, whose initial assessment, contracting, rebates and tax credits were overseen by the Opportunity Council of Bellingham.

Sustainable Connections' goal is to help Whatcom County residents save \$1,000,000 in annual energy costs by 2012. To learn more about comprehensive energy efficiency services for your home or business, visit www.CommunityEnergyChallenge.org.

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