

Stimulus funds allow organization to offer those who can't afford it ...

Protection from the cold

Staff photo by Shane Opatz

Weatherization program specialists from Western Dairyland Community Action Agency installed a new furnace and water heater at Kathleen Glasmyer's Eau Claire home. Gina Andrews, one of 15 employees recently hired by Western Dairyland, sprayed loose insulation into the home's walls Friday through several holes drilled into the wood siding.

By Andrew Dowd
Leader-Telegram staff

Kathleen Glasmyer's 108-year-old house had no insulation in the walls, her water heater leaked carbon monoxide into the house and the aging furnace made its death rattle on a cold night a month ago.

"I had so many problems with that furnace," she said. "I put so much money into it."

In lieu of the furnace, she'd run space heaters during the day to warm parts of the home, but then turn them off at night because of their potential to cause fires.

At night, she said she'd bundle up to stay warm in the drafty house.

But on Friday, her new furnace ran at 95 percent efficiency, the



Glasmyer



Canaday

water heater had been replaced and workers were filling the walls of her home with loose insulation.

It didn't cost Glasmyer anything but is expected to

cut her energy bills by 30 to 40 percent.

"Whatever a home takes or whatever it needs, we do," said Mike Canaday, energy and hous-

How to Apply

■ Federal stimulus funds increased money to winter heating assistance and home weatherization programs for low-income families.

The result has opened the program to more households by raising the income level for eligibility.

A family of four making \$45,068 or less this year is eligible under this year's threshold based on 60 percent of the state's median income.

Previously the programs required

people to be at 150 percent of the federal poverty level or lower. That would mean a \$33,075 family income this year.

■ For information on applying for heating assistance or weatherization in Eau Claire County, call 839-1023. Applications can be found at suite 101 in the Job Center, 221 W. Madison St.

■ The statewide phone number for the program is 866-HEATWIS (432-8947).

ing director for Western Dairyland Community Action Agency.

There's no set cost limit per home on the weatherization that can be done, Canaday said. He estimated that materials and labor at Glasmyer's home will total \$7,500 to \$8,000.

For the fiscal year ending in

June, Western Dairyland has \$3.7 million to spend on home weatherization, a large boost over prior years, as a result of federal stimulus funds.

"Stimulus increased my budget by 70 percent," Canaday said.

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Winter/Applications being accepted

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Last year, about 250 homes in the four-county service area underwent upgrades, but their target is 427 by the end of the agency's fiscal year in June. Fifteen employees have been hired by Western Dairyland to handle the increase.

So far, about 300 households have applied for the weatherization program in Eau Claire, Buffalo, Jackson and Trempealeau counties.

"We're still looking for another 100 applications," Canaday said.

On Friday, Western Dairyland visited Glasmyer's Hudson Street home to audit the water heater and furnace that were recently installed and also add insulation to her home. Future tasks include replacing all her light bulbs with compact fluorescent ones and switching her old

refrigerator with a new Energy Star-certified one.

It's a relief to Glasmyer, 47, who still recalls a shocking \$750 heating bill she received for one particularly cold month a couple winters ago. And bills like that would be a big financial hit for Glasmyer, who has been living on unemployment since losing her job as a nursing assistant last January.

Glasmyer said her medical issues, including a bad knee and rotator cuff, have made her employment search difficult.

"Nobody wants to hire me considering my medical restrictions," she said.

Recently she's focused her job search on call center jobs, and she's applying for Social Security disability.

Last winter was the first time

Glasmyer applied for heating assistance to help pay her winter energy bills. Doing so also made her eligible for weatherization, which has the same income-level requirements.

Both programs widened their scope this year because of the stimulus package.

Previously, households making 150 percent of the federal poverty level or less could qualify. But the added funding allowed the programs to increase eligibility to families at or below 60 percent of the median Wisconsin household income. The result was that a family of four could earn 36 percent more money and still qualify for assistance.

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