

Weatherization Program Offered Through Community Action Agency

By Arlene Bachanov Daily Telegram Special Writer
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ADRIAN — Homeowners and renters who meet certain low-income requirements can have their residences weatherized through a program operated by the Community Action Agency. But time is running short before the program ends.

The CAA has always offered a weatherization program for low-income residents of the community, but beginning in 2009 more people were able to be helped through funding provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

“Part of (the stimulus money) was to help put people back to work and cut energy bills,” said Burt Fenby, director of the CAA. “We used to do maybe 100 houses per year. The government wanted us to ramp up to 1,000.” The act originally gave the CAA \$5 million for the program. That amount later increased by \$7 million and then \$3 million.

CAA has weatherized more than 1,600 homes so far with those funds. Additionally, the program also works through utility companies to allow residents to upgrade to more energy-efficient appliances, and locally has provided more than 630 new refrigerators, more than 400 furnaces, and more than 350 hot water heaters.

CAA also was able to increase the number of contractors working on the program from 14 to 81 and to hire nine additional staff of its own. There are also 12 inspectors now.

Fenby outlined how the weatherization program works. An energy auditor comes to the home and assesses what will make it the most energy-efficient. “They come out and measure energy loss and where it is, and then they start with what makes the most difference” in weatherizing the home, he said. Generally, that means work like insulation, caulking, and weatherstripping.

Then, contractors do whatever work the auditor determines is needed; the resident doesn’t get to pick what gets done. Finally, the auditor comes back to make sure the work was done properly.

Fenby said that a home might get between \$4,000 to \$6,000 worth of work. And in general, he added, residents can save about 30 percent on their utility bills as a result. “It’s just a great program. I really recommend it,” he said.

But people need to sign up quickly. The program will end in March, but Fenby said it’s not clear right now if that means all work must be done by then, or if homes “in the pipeline” at that point can still have the work completed. Either way, he urged qualifying county residents to apply immediately, since it will take some time for the work to be done. Both homeowners and qualifying renters can apply. The income limit is 200 percent of the poverty line, which translates to different figures depending on family size. A single person cannot make more than \$21,780. For renters, the landlord must agree to not raise the rent because of the improvements to the home, Fenby said.

People interested in applying can call CAA at 263-7861 or 800-438-1845, and then come in to fill out an application or have one sent to them. The office is located at 400 W.

South St., Adrian. They will need to supply proof of income, utility bills, and proof of ownership or, in the case of a rental property, the landlord’s name, address and phone number.