

## Utility Committee formed to help all in Lenawee pay for electricity

By Nancy C. Bishop December 27, 2012

Lenawee County has a strong collaboration of nonprofits, businesses and government agencies that are working together to improve the quality of life and opportunities for all of our residents. In doing this we are always looking at what is working, what needs changing and what additional needs are going unmet.

One of the tools that we are utilizing is the Central Michigan 211 resource. Many know that Central Michigan 211 is helpful for people looking for assistance. Central Michigan 211 also is a powerful tool for collecting data. The 2011 Central Michigan 211 Annual Community Report tells us that the No. 1 need in Lenawee County is for electric service payment assistance. It also tells us that the number one unmet need in Lenawee County is for electric services payment assistance.

A group of local nonprofit agencies took a look at this data and recently formed a new committee, the Utilities Committee. The Utilities Committee is comprised of representatives from the Community Action Agency, the Department of Human Services, The Salvation Army, Midwest Energy, Goodwill, Consumers Energy and Citizen's Gas Fuel Co.

Although this committee is still in its infancy stages it has begun to make changes and move toward a more efficient approach to assisting with utility payment. The Utilities Committee has set three goals: educate the public on where to go for assistance, educate the public on how to save energy in order to reduce costs for utilities and assist with utility costs before shut off is necessary in order to avoid paying fees and penalties.

The Utilities Committee has already created and distributed a flyer that assists the public by letting them know where to go for help and how to save energy. This flyer is available at all member agency locations as well as at public libraries, post offices and many senior centers. Distribution of the flyer will continue to ensure that it is easily accessible to all.

Midwest Energy and Consumers Energy have both donated booklets that the flyers have been inserted in. Both booklets ("More Than 100 Ways to Save on Your Energy Bill" and "101 Low Cost/No Cost Home Energy Saving Measures") offer information on how you can save energy.

The Utilities Committee has also begun a campaign to generate funds in order to assist individuals prior to receiving a shutoff notice. The committee is organizing a Walk for Warmth event. This event will occur at 10 a.m. Feb. 23 at Adrian High School. At this event, the committee will continue its efforts to educate the community about the need, how to conserve energy and will campaign to raise funds for the initiative.

The funds generated by the Utilities Committee will be used to assist the public *before* the shutoff occurs. Currently, most agencies require a shutoff notice prior to assisting an individual. Assisting with payment prior to a shutoff notice will reduce the total cost of assistance as it eliminates the need to pay penalties and reconnect fees.

If you would like more information about the Utilities Committee please contact Amy Palmer, executive director of the Lenawee United Way, at 263-4696; Burt Fenby, Lenawee County director of Community Action Agency, at 263-7861; or Nancy Bishop, community resource coordinator for the Lenawee County office of the Michigan Department of Human Services, 264-6404.

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