



CITIZEN PATRIOT • GEORGIA RHODES

Jackson resident Tim Vandenburg, owner of Vandenburg Building Co., peers into a hole in the roof of a Michigan Center home to check the insulation levels. The company was working on weatherizing the home. "That's the main part of it — insulating — to try and cut down on heat loss," Vandenburg said about weatherizing.

FULL OF ENERGY

Program helps low-income residents make homes energy efficient

By Ingrid Jacques
For the Citizen Patriot

In midst of an economic downturn, Jackson builder Tim Vandenburg is using his talents to help others who are less fortunate.

Vandenburg, who owns Vandenburg Building Co., does consistent work for the Community Action Agency's weatherization program, which funds energy-saving repairs for low-income homeowners and renters.

In the year he's served as a contractor with the agency, he said he has done work in at least 30 area homes. Since the need for residential building in Jackson has nearly disappeared, Vandenburg said he's grateful for the jobs. "Work is work," he said.

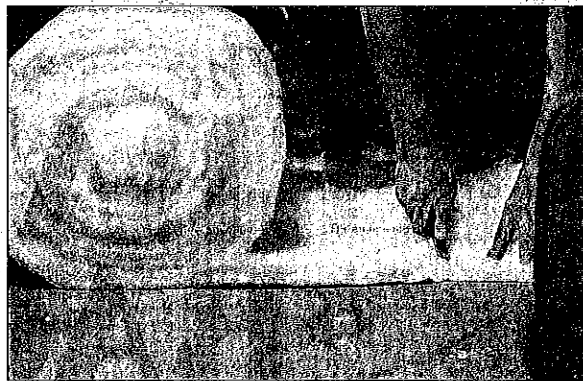
A lot more work will be on the way, too.

The Community Action Agency is getting \$5.7 million in federal stimulus money to help low-income families make their homes more energy efficient and save money on utility bills, said Dawn Flynn, director of the agency's weatherization program.

During a normal year, the agency works on 125 to 175 homes through its weatherization program at an average cost of \$3,000 a home in Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee counties, Flynn said. With the stimulus money, the agency plans to work on around 1,000 homes in all three counties.

The money covers contracted labor and supplies. And the extra funding will also allow the agency to allocate more money per home — up to \$6,500. Flynn said the agency needs to spend the federal funds within two years.

Eligibility, based on the size of the



Vandenburg cuts a piece of insulation to put in the basement of a Michigan Center home.

family and its household income, is being raised. Previously, a family of four would have to earn \$33,000 or less a year to be eligible. Now, the maximum income level for a family of four is increased to \$44,100.

The weatherization program provides energy-efficiency services for eligible households. Those include insulation and health and safety measures. The program also funds improvements to keep cold air out, such as caulking, weather-stripping doors and new windows.

Vandenburg said he enjoys getting to do weatherization work, including installing insulation, replacing broken windows and repairing doors.

"Most everyone I've come across is appreciative of the work being done," he said. "I really enjoy doing it. I see something getting done every day."

Flynn said she usually has around

75 active applications for weatherization services but that there generally is not "a huge waiting list."

She said she has noticed an increase of applications this year and believes the economy has played a part.

So the additional federal funding will prove especially useful.

In addition to the weatherization, the agency also offers the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program for more significant improvements such as roof, furnace or water heater repairs and replacements.

Since the 1970s, the Community Action Agency estimates it has provided weatherization services to around 5,000 homes in Jackson, Lenawee and Hillsdale counties. Flynn said the agency provides these repairs throughout the year but that it does the least amount of work in the winter.

How to apply for program

To apply for the Community Action Agency's weatherization program:

1. Schedule an appointment to complete a weatherization program application.
2. If you are eligible and your home has not been weatherized in the past 10 years, a contractor will schedule an inspection of your home.
3. If your home is eligible based on weatherization needs, a contractor will schedule the work performed.
4. Upon completion, a post-inspection will schedule an inspection of your home to evaluate the weatherization measures installed and make sure you are satisfied with the work performed.

For more information, call the Community Action Agency at 784-4800 or visit its Web site, www.caajlh.org.