

Program helps pay heat bills

More Jackson residents may qualify for low-income credit

By Tarryl Jackson

tjackson@citpat.com — 768-4941

The deadline is approaching for Jackson-area residents to apply for state and federal money to help pay their energy bills.

Applications for the Michigan Home Heating Credit, which helps low-income people with winter energy bills, are due Sept. 30.

With energy costs continuing to climb, Consumers Energy and local agencies are urging low-income residents to file for the credit to keep the heat on in their homes this fall and winter.

"Unfortunately, many of those eligible do not take advantage of this program," Deb Harmon, Consumers Energy's customer assistance coordinator, said in a news release.

Unemployment in Jackson County hit 15.5 percent in June. Many of the recently unemployed are facing joblessness for the first time and are not familiar with the resources available.

The Home Heating Credit program is funded by the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

About \$65 million went to more than 440,000 households in Michigan — an average of \$147 per household — through the home-heating program between Oct. 1, 2007, and Sept. 30, 2008, according to the state Department of Human Services.

About \$970,000 went to 7,034 Jackson County households — an average payment of \$137 — in that same time frame.

How to apply for the credit

The Home Heating Credit Claim form (MI-1040CR7) can be found at most public libraries, Secretary of State branch offices and Department of Human Services branch offices. Residents also can get the form by calling the Michigan Department of Treasury at 800-367-6263 or by visiting www.michigan.gov/treasury.

Heating credits can help with utility bills

Continued from A1

The year before, about 415,000 state households received \$83 million through the federally funded program. In that same year, about 6,300 households in Jackson County received about \$1.2 million in home-heating credit.

Eligibility for the home-heating credit is based on household income and number of exemptions. An alternative credit is based on heating costs.

Home-heating credits are administered through the state Department of Treasury.

The Community Action Agency in Jackson has filed about 1,400 home-heating credits — amounting to more than \$200,000 — so far this year through its free tax-preparation program.

"We still have volunteers available to help people file their credits," said Chris Kilmer, director of community programs at the Community Action Agency.

The agency receives about 800 calls a month during the winter season from people who needed assistance with paying their utility bills.

"We expect it's going to increase significantly (this fall)," Kilmer said.

The Jackson Citizen Patriot

Tuesday, August 25, 2009