

WEATHERIZATION CASH'S IMPACT

Federal money has warmed homes, invested in future

Since 1976, Community Action Agency has been helping to reduce America's reliance on foreign oil. It's done this by improving the energy efficiency of homes for low-to moderate-income households in our weatherization program.

With a dramatic boost in funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, also known as the federal stimulus, we will complete 15 years' worth of work in the next two and a half years. To date, local contractors have weatherized 800 homes and are working to make up to 2,000 area homes energy-efficient.

These stimulus funds have supported existing private sector contractors and local small businesses. These contractors and crews made our three-county region of Jackson, Lenawee, and Hillsdale a top producer in the state.
Contracted to weatherize 800



Marsha Kreucher

Guest columnist

homes in three years, our crews did it in just one year. Because their work was so good, CAA received an additional performance grant that expanded and extended the work to March 2012. It has been a big win, infusing millions of dollars into our local economy.

Beyond the goal of helping achieve energy-independence,

CAA has also used the funds to achieve the following:

■ Jobs and training — This funding supported the hiring of more than 100 workers from the community, representing local contractors, crews and independent energy auditors who have completed training and received certifications in fields that have viable, high-wage and high-demand futures. More simply, we are training workers for the future of America.

■ Buying local — Building and insulation supplies have been purchased locally; almost 300 furnaces and hot-water heaters and 350 Michigan-made refrigerators have been installed. Consumers Energy was a partner in supporting energy-efficiency measures. In other words, we've kept the money local.

■ Reducing energy costs — Eight hundred households have seen an average reduction in energy costs

of 35 percent and benefited from energy improvements. The efficiency improvements are chosen for maximum return on investment, conserving energy and reducing costs. This will help reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

CAA does not have a political purpose, but it does have a people purpose. We see firsthand the profound impact these funds have had locally. We are keeping seniors warm and helping unemployed workers and young families pay their bills. We are keeping our older historic housing repaired and updated. We support struggling small businesses that might not have made it through the year without work.

The stories of seniors, cold at home, families fearful about bills beyond their reach and businesses worried about closure are heart-rending. The economic crisis in

Michigan touched many who never imagined they would ever need help. We all have the same fear, which is that tomorrow might not be as good as yesterday. We are helping to make that fear go away. We are working to do our part to support a thriving community.

We're proud the funds we received have been well-spent today, but also know these investments are important for our future. Although we are just a small corner of the world, we are part of a national commitment to reduce dependence on foreign oil. We think conserving energy and buying local will do that. It's an important time to have faith in the future. Tomorrow can be better than yesterday if we work for it. CAA is working. So is this program.

— Marsha Kreucher is chief executive officer of the Community Action Agency