

Contacts:

Amy W. Fuller
 News from the REC Editor
 1.814.398.5364

Mary Mulligan-Haines
 Communications/Marketing Manager
 1.814.398.5307

Marilyn Jones
 Engineering & Operations Supervisor
 1.814.398.5310

Linda King
 Business Development Manager
 1.814.398.5303

Kevin Hindman
 Engineering/Field Services Superintendent
 1.814.398.5366

HELP makes energy efficiency easier

Contributed by Ben Mourer

This past fall the Meadville Community Energy Project not only improved upon, but also expanded, its already popular Home Energy Loan Program (HELP), making it even easier for the people of Northwest Pennsylvania to make energy improvements to their homes. Recent colder winter temperatures mean an increase in energy consumption and higher utility bills. The HELP loan program is a great way for individuals to combat these high bills.

The HELP loan, administrated by MCEP and the Meadville Redevelopment Authority, was created in the spring of 2002 to help local homeowners and landlords, of all income levels, make energy-saving improvements to their properties. Funding for the loan program is provided by the Penelec Sustainable Energy Fund.

Now, HELP is available at a lower interest rate, with a higher maximum borrowing amount, for a



broader range of home improvements, to residents of both Erie and Crawford Counties. To encourage more people to take advantage of the HELP loan, interest rates on the loan have been dropped from 5% down to 4%, making the loan a less expensive option than most other forms of financing home improvements. In addition to the reduction of interest rates, MCEP has also increased the maximum borrowing amount of the loan from \$6,000 to \$10,000.

HELP loans are now also easier to apply for. Formerly, to be eligible for the loan, applicants were required to receive a Home Energy Rating, an in-house assessment done by MCEP on the property to rate its energy efficiency, at a cost of \$200 (which can be folded into the loan itself). This rating, although greatly beneficial in making recommendations for im-

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Contractors Gather Together—Northwestern REC sponsored a Contractor's Meeting on February 17, 2005. Tim Polaski from MDIA (right photo), discussed electrical code requirements. Tim Meyer of Faivre Electric (left photo), was the grand prize winner at this event. He won two airline tickets to anywhere in the continental United States.

TIPS FROM THE REC

Square D Product Recall

Square D is working in conjunction with the Consumer Products Safety Commission on a voluntary recall of its arc fault interrupter (AFI) circuit breakers manufactured between March 1, 2004 and September 23, 2004.

Tests indicate that the arc detection capability may become inoperable in these breakers due to the failure of an internal component in the electronic detection circuit. They found that the breaker will not properly detect or interrupt a high resistance low current arcing fault.

The short circuit and overload interruption capability of these breakers continues to function properly. This means that the circuit breakers will continue to provide the same level of protection offered by a standard circuit breaker, but will not provide the additional arcing fault protection required by local building codes.

"Our number one priority is the safety of our people, our customers and our products." Call Square D's AFI Breakers Recall Center toll-free 1-877-202-9046 with questions or for more information.

Source: www.squared.com ♦

2005 Contractor's Meeting Summary

February 17, 2005—Speaking to a crowd of more than 130 contractors, Tim Polaski of Middle Department Inspection Agency, discussed electrical requirements under the new Uniform Construction Code (UCC). From stairwell lighting to the appropriate number of room outlets, to hardwiring smoke alarm systems, Polaski covered much material yet only touched the surface of the UCC.

According to comments gathered at this event, contractors appreciate and desire more information about the UCC and other electrical changes. In the near future, Northwestern REC hopes to have all Power Point presentations from this event available on its Web site—visit www.NorthwesternREC.coop for more information.

In the mean time, for materials that were distributed at the 2005 Contractor's Meeting, contact Amy W. Fuller, Marketing Coordinator, at 800/472-7910 or by e-mail: afuller@northwesternrec.coop.

The winner of the Contractor Meeting grand prize—two round trip airline tickets to anywhere in the continental United States—was Tim Meyer of Faivre Electric in Cambridge Springs. Congratulations Tim. ♦

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improvements to better save energy, is no longer required.

Applicants can now choose any number of improvements from MCEP's 'Eligible Measures' list. **Eligible Measures include high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, domestic hot water systems, insulation, air sealing, and replacement and/or storm windows and doors. The HELP loan also covers refrigerators, freezers, clothes washers, dishwashers, dehumidifiers, and room air conditioners that have received the government's Energy Star® rating.**

The loan program has expanded beyond the borders of Crawford County, to include all of Erie County in its coverage area. Erie County homeowners and landlords now have the same opportunity as Crawford County residents to receive the low-interest loan to save on utility bills. This expansion not only doubles the area where the loans are available, but more than triples the number of households that can apply.

Several local homeowners have already taken advantage of the loan program this fall, such as Jason and Kristine Finck of Meadville, who commented on MCEP and the HELP loan saying, "MCEP is a wonderful program for homeowners. It teaches homeowners to make quality improvements that will save them money. The educational information MCEP provides is easy to understand, and with the energy loan, making improvements now is even easier and more affordable."

HELP loans are a great way for individuals to make improvements to their homes. Kathy Greely, Co-Director of MCEP adds, "With home equity rates increasing, HELP loans are the cheapest way to borrow money for energy-related home improvements. And, with natural gas costs projected to rise by 11% this winter, and heating oil costs by 29%, there's no time like the present to add some insulation or replace your elderly furnace."

Several local appliance dealers, including Flick's TV and Appliance, Fullerton Appliance Center, Sears of Meadville, Sears and Lowes of Erie, and a large number of area contractors are participating in the program. See <http://welcome.to/mcep> for a full list of participating contractors. ♦

CO-OP NEWS

BA's Home Show

Didn't make it to the Contractor's Meeting this year? No problem! Come visit us at the Builder's Association's 45th Annual Home Show at the Family First Sports Park in Erie. The show is scheduled for March 31, April 1—3.

Northwestern REC will have information about why it is SMART to Go Electric, including the new Comfort Plus program offered at the Co-op, as well as information about energy efficiency and the Co-op RFS III on-lot septic system.

Print the 45th Home Show flier found at our Web site, www.NorthwesternREC.coop, and bring it to our booth during the show for an extra prize. We hope to see you there. ♦

Tell over 20,000 people about your business and golf at the same time!

Northwestern REC is recruiting sponsors and golfers for the first annual Member-to-Member Golf Outing. The Outing is scheduled for June 29, 2005 at Mount Hope Golf Course. Gold Sponsors receive advertising in Penn Lines, the membership-wide magazine, as well as a year membership to Member \$en\$e, the coupon advertising flier that goes to all members on a quarterly basis. Silver and Bronze sponsors also receive great advertising opportunities.

For more information, visit the Co-op's Web site at www.NorthwesternREC.coop, see the flyer included with this newsletter, or call Mary Mulligan-Haines, Communications/Marketing Manager, at 800/472-7910. ♦

Visit www.NorthwesternREC.coop frequently for other Co-op news.