

Energy waste reductions mark milestone

BY JEFF MORRIS ON MAY 27, 2016 IN LEAD NEWS

Lewisboro residents and officials were among those in attendance at a celebratory picnic held in Bedford Hills on May 10 to mark 1,000 homes in Westchester County having undergone upgrades to reduce energy waste. The event was hosted by Energize NY, a community-based energy efficiency program operating within the Energy Improvement Corp. (EIC), a New York State local development corporation.

Mark Thielking, executive director of Energize NY, said the effort originated in the town of Bedford, under its Bedford 2020 plan.

“It started with a small group of people,” said Bedford Supervisor Chris Burdick, who added that his colleague on the town board, former supervisor Lee Roberts, “was very much a part of that.” Burdick said it seemed like a radical idea at the time: reducing greenhouse emissions by 20% by the year 2020, and making that a priority for the town.

“The town of Bedford became the first municipality in the state of New York to make that a part of our comprehensive town plan. The idea of that drastic reduction, at a time when greenhouse emissions were increasing — and that has now become the norm; it’s what we do.”

According to Thielking and others at the event, the program has spread throughout the Hudson Valley and is now all across New York State. The program entails having homeowners sign up for a free energy audit, which points out areas that can be easily upgraded to reduce energy waste and make homes more comfortable while lowering fuel costs. Through a network of cooperating organizations and contractors, homeowners can arrange for improvements to be made with low-cost financing. The energy savings usually pay for the expenditure within a short time.

“The average savings for these upgrades is 25%,” said Thielking. “That means an annual savings of \$2 million a year — about \$1,000 a home. The community has really benefited as well. We’re avoiding, now, 5,000 tons of carbon emissions a year; we’re avoiding tons and tons of particulate and nitrous oxide and sulfur dioxide emissions that cause asthma and heart disease. And we’ve added \$5 million in economic activity in the communities that run Energize, which means dozens and dozens of jobs. This is the new social norm that you’ve created.”

Thielking recognized Lewisboro’s Sustainability Committee, led by Robert Karpel, Mike Gordon, Bob Fischman and Town Board member Dan Welsh, as well as Sustainable Westchester as a key participant, with Burdick and Gordon as chairs and Leo Wegman as executive director. Among the other local officials in attendance were Lewisboro Supervisor Peter Parsons and County Legislator Francis Corcoran.

Eileen Nadelson of South Salem and Grace Kulwin of Cross River were among those present who had taken part in the program, and both were enthusiastic about the result.

“The original owner had the assessment done in the spring of 2015,” said Nadelson. “I moved in in the fall and looked further into it. After talking with several companies I decided on one to have the work done.”

Nadelson’s 50-year-old house had three separate attics. “They used spray foam to completely insulate the attics,” said Nadelson. “I also had insulation added around the sills and under the ceiling. I immediately noticed it was much warmer in the front rooms; I used to freeze up in my home office, but after the work it was much more comfortable.”

Nadelson said she plans to have a follow-up assessment done next year.

Kulwin, who has owned a condo in The Meadows since 2000, had an assessment done in 2012. “I needed insulation everywhere,” she said, “and there was an air duct that they found had completely separated, and was leaking into the attic.”

She had spray foam and weatherstripping added, and said the results have been remarkable.

“The whole house is much more comfortable,” said Kulwin, “and my energy usage has dropped 50%.”

Jon Davey, a contractor who worked on Kulwin’s home, said the attic had been very drafty.

“The work took about a week to complete,” said Davey. “But it definitely made a big difference.”

Davey said while older homes are usually those with the greatest need for improved insulation, even relatively new construction may not always be as energy efficient as one might think.

“It depends on the contractor,” said Davey. “It’s something that you really need to check into.”

More information on Energize NY and the other agencies involved can be obtained at EnergizeNY.org.

Editor’s Note:

This article has been updated to clarify that it was Dan Welsh, not Charles Duffy, who was recognized for his membership in Lewisboro’s Sustainability Committee.



COUNTY LEGISLATOR FRANCIS CORCORAN (LEFT), SOUTH SALEM RESIDENT EILEEN NADELSON, TOWN BOARD MEMBER DAN WELSH, CROSS RIVER RESIDENT GRACE KULWIN, LEWISBORO SUPERVISOR PETER PARSONS, BEDFORD SUPERVISOR CHRIS BURDICK, AND SOUTH SALEM RESIDENT AND SUSTAINABLE WESTCHESTER CO-CHAIR MIKE GORDON ATTENDED THE ENERGIZE NY PICNIC ON MAY 10. — JEFF MORRIS PHOTO



COUNTY LEGISLATOR FRANCIS CORCORAN (LEFT), LEWISBORO SUPERVISOR PETER PARSONS AND BEDFORD SUPERVISOR CHRIS BURDICK AT THE ENERGIZE NY PICNIC ON MAY 10. — JEFF MORRIS PHOTO