

program helps provide warmth

By Sarah Cox

Making a home snug, warm and tight for the approaching winter months just makes financial sense and even more sense for low-income families. This is where the local weatherization program can be of benefit.

According to the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, those in low-income households typically spend 17 percent of their total income on energy, as compared with four percent in other households.

Considering that the median income for the group that is eligible for weatherization is \$12,373 for a household of two, and that more than 90 percent of low-income households have an annual income of under \$15,000, the program can have a large impact.

The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), under the U.S. Department of Energy, was created in 1976 and is operated in all 50 states, in addition to the District of Columbia, in Native American tribes and in U.S. territories. It is designed to help reduce dependence on foreign oil while improving the health and safety of low-income citizens.

According to Bill Beachy, vice president of Energy Services for Community Housing Partners, there have been several local providers of the Weatherization Assistance Program, including New River Community Action; however, Community Housing Partners (CHP) has been involved in the program since its inception.

Beachy tracked the program's production relative to the state fiscal year (July through June).

"CHP, under funding agreements with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, assists eligible households in 25 localities located throughout the New River Valley, northern Shenandoah Valley and northern Virginia," he said.

"CHP assisted 250 to 300 households each, on average, fiscal years 2007 and 2008. With additional funding that became available

through the Stimulus Bill signed by President Obama in early 2009, CHP was able to assist more than 430 eligible households in Fiscal Year 2009 and 590 households in fiscal year 2010. CHP, using stimulus funds, increased its Weatherization staff from 19 in 2008 to 45 current Weatherization staff in order to accomplish this increase in assisted households."

Billy Weitzenfeld, executive director of Association of Energy Conservation Professionals (AECP), said the mission of the Weatherization Assistance Program is to increase the energy efficiency of dwellings occupied by low-income families.

This is done through a complete energy audit, a heating system inspection, a combustion appliance zone testing and a whole-house pressure testing. Inefficient and unsafe heating and cooling systems are repaired or replaced, duct work is repaired, insulation is installed, carbon monoxide and lead tests are conducted, inefficient appliances are replaced and homeowners are

provided energy education.

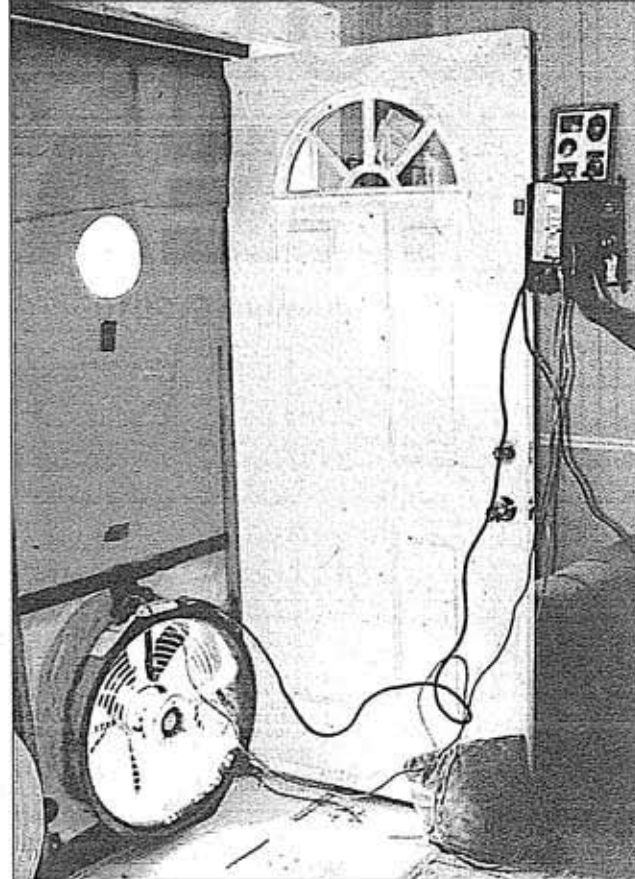
According to figures this can reduce the energy costs an average of 33 percent, and by-products of this are decreasing the nation's energy consumption as well as decreasing air pollution and carbon emissions. Since 1992, the AECP has served as a support group for the Weatherization program — according to Weitzenfeld, there are 22 such programs in Virginia.

Nationally, the program has served more than 6.4 million low-income households, saving an average of \$447 in energy bills per household. The total allocation for fiscal year 2009 was \$250 million.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, as many as 20 to 30 million U.S. families are eligible for weatherization services, which are allocated by state. If a household receives Supplemental Security Income or Aid to Families with Dependent Children, they are automatically eligible to receive weatherization services. In addition, states give preference to those who are older than 60, families with a disabled member and families with children.

WEATHERIZING YOUR HOME

According to Energy Star.gov (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency), a homeowner can do simple things such as adding insulation, and sealing leaks and ductwork to reduce the amount of heat lost during winter months. Handy materials to have are caulk and weather stripping for around windows and doors.



Part of the Weatherization Assistance Program, administered by Community Housing Partners, is giving eligible households energy audits and then securing the home for energy efficiency. Part of the energy audit is a blower door test that reveals air leaks in the house, and among the repairs to a house includes added insulation.

