A recent story that appeared on Energy Empowers

Weatherization fueling Iowa job opportunities

When Cascade Manufacturing in Eldrige, Iowa, laid Gary Anderson off in December 2008, Gary spent seven long months on unemployment. He started searching for any sort of job that fit in with the job skills he picked up at Cascade, a truss manufacturer. Without a steady paycheck, Gary says it was tough to stretch his money in order to keep up with bills and feed his family at the same time.

The feeling of uneasiness Gary had when he thought about not having a steady income constantly reminded him to stay focused on the job hunt. Fortunately, Community Action of Eastern Iowa was one of the first agencies in the country to take weatherization stimulus funds and start filling positions for its residential energy efficiency program.

CAEI photo

Gary Anderson drills into a wall in order to install weatherization measures that will help an Iowa home save energy.

Gary was hired as a crew laborer in July by CAEI, based in Davenport. The community action agency usually weatherizes 91 homes each year in four counties. This year, the organization expects that number to rise to about 650 with the help of federal stimulus money — $80 million during the next three years in Recovery Act funding awarded to the state for weatherization projects from the U.S. Department of Energy.

"I've finally been able to set a budget each week because I now know I have an income coming in," Gary says, adding that it feels good for his family to start getting back to normal instead of dealing with a cloud of dread. The family's hope and faith that Gary would find a good job paid off, and he's not the only one who has benefited.

So far, CAEI has hired about 12 production staff members with stimulus funding, and the group additionally hires contractors for the projects, says Maureen Stoops, operations manager. The weatherization projects act not only as a way to improve energy efficiency and save on costs for families in the region, but also they provide a catalyst for jobs in Iowa.

The average cost for weatherizing a home in Iowa — where weatherization techs like Gary do jobs such as plugging air leaks, insulating walls and attics, and replacing heating systems — is about $6,500, but the Iowa Utilities Board estimates that every dollar spent in the short-

CAEI photo

Gary Anderson says he enjoys his new work environment performing weatherization on homes for an Iowa community action agency.

term will yield about $2 in savings down the road.

Gary says he enjoys the attitude of the people he now works with at CAEI and that transitioning his previous skills in the manufacturing industry to his new position has been easy because of similarities in taking efficiency measurements, using specialized tools and communicating with other workers to find and fix problems.

"I like the type of work I am doing on homes and really appreciate the opportunity to help other people," he says.

More information about Community Action of Eastern Iowa is available at www.iacommunityaction.org.

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