

Solar power saves green $ for Healy Heights residents

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Solar water heating is affordable, and low-income family champion NeighborImpact has partnered with Cascade Sun Works to prove it. During the week of March 5th, Curci's company installed the solar water heaters in eight apartment units at Healy Heights.

The estimated reduction in heating burden comes from the fact that, as Colleen Neel, Home Weatherization Specialist put it, "We can get the energy from the sun for free, for that which we currently pay Pacific Power \$25 dollars a month for."

Neel says this will result in an 80 percent reduction in the energy bill of those using solar water heaters versus traditional electric water heaters.

Linda Abbott of Healy Heights Apartment Complex H lives in one of the eight residences that received a solar system to heat her water. She says that not only does "every little bit help when you're on a fixed income", but that she has plans for the extra money she will save. Her daughter Tiffany Hogue, a senior at Bend High School, wants to go to college. And Abbot is sure that little bit extra is going to make a difference.

The reduction in cost may be even bigger than taking the next step in building assets or getting a few extra luxuries. As Neel put it, "some people move out in the middle of the night because of they can't afford to pay their power bill. By reducing energy burdens, we are not only putting money in our clients pockets that they did not have, but we are also reducing the likelihood that they will need energy assistance from us later."

Curci is just pleased that the partnership is happening, because it's his company's chance to debunk the myth that solar energy is not both sustainable and affordable.

Abbot says she is glad to learn about energy efficiency anyway she can. Previously, low-wattage light bulbs were installed in Healy apartments to save money. And since then she has the sense that renewable energy, energy efficiency, and "green" values are not just for her (since transitional housing residents are only at Healy two years) but also, "for the future, and for other people who will be in these apartments."

So, while many like Abbot may be proud to live in the first apartment complex that preheats the water through energy collected in solar panels, the solar water heaters themselves are now also a feature of NeighborImpact's Home Weatherization Program which is visited by other clients, other than those in transitional housing, as well.

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