

Pete Street offers big savings with small changes

By Anna Starnes
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Clean Energy Durham, a non-profit organization focused on cutting energy usage and costs in neighborhoods throughout North Carolina, is working to promote energy efficiency through interactive workshops.

Last year, employees produced a teaching program called Pete Street, which the organization sells to different communities in the state. So far, Durham, Chapel Hill, Wilson and Siler City are all licensed to use Pete Street, and the program is about to launch in Carrboro.

The Pete Street pilot project started in Warren County, N.C. and worked with Halifax Electric Membership Corporation. The UNC-Chapel Hill Environmental Finance Center analyzed the data available from the study and concluded that residents used 17.5 percent less electricity after attending a Pete Street workshop than residents who did not attend.

Lenora Smith, the organization's community outreach director, explained Pete Street's effective approach.

"As part of the workshop activities, we try to get a commitment from them to do at least one thing after the workshop and to teach one thing to a neighbor," she said. "We focus specifically on neighborhoods because we have a neighbor to neighbor model."

The Pete Street program consists of two workshops. The basic energy education workshop teaches no cost or low cost ways to save energy. To review the tips, participants play a bingo game. Smith said that this workshop creates an initial relationship with the community.

Tom Higgins, the energy education director at Clean Energy Durham said, "The way we designed the workshops is to make them fun and accessi-

ble to people. We make it so it's something they feel they could leave the workshop and do the projects."

Many of the energy-saving techniques revolve around simply changing residents' behavior. Higgins explained that many people are unaware that appliances still use energy even when they are not turned on. This concept of phantom energy costs people money and can be easily fixed by unplugging these appliances.

The second facet of the program is the hands-on workshop. This class is held in a home or home-like setting where the leader demonstrates simple energy-saving projects around the house. The leader cleans refrigerator coils, caulks air leaks around the windows and doors and weather strips the house. Smith says people are always interested to see all of the "dust bunnies" that come out from under the refrigerator.

Mary Odom, resident of Forestview Heights neighborhood in Durham, is a participant in the program.

"One of my neighbors who was working for the program invited me to attend the first workshop in the community," she said. "While I was there, they asked if there was anyone who would have one in their homes and I accepted."

Odom said the hands-on workshop leader cleaned her refrigerator coils and her dryer. They even went with her to Home Depot to purchase pieces that fit under her door and block air from slipping in. She said she saved money last year on her energy bill compared to the year before.

"It has helped me be more conscious of my environment and to not waste energy," she said.

Higgins noted that the program



Tom Higgins of Clean Energy Durham, displays a visual aid demonstrating how air escapes a home. (Staff photo by Anna Starnes)

is called Pete Street because Pete is any person in the community who wants to share the energy-saving message. Once residents attend a basic energy education workshop, they are able to teach one on their own, as it is a scripted program.

Pete Street can also benefit more than just homeowners. Renters often end up paying more than homeowners in utility bills and could save money with the program's tips. As long as they check with their landlords, renters can usually make most of the changes as well.

In order to ensure the program has a lasting effect, the staff checks back in with the workshop participants about two weeks after the program. The survey gauges their interest in further involvement.

Higgins said that as the program becomes more integrated in an area, it becomes more heavily driven by volunteers. While staff members schedule the workshops, the organization needs volunteers to run them and to continue the message. The next basic energy education workshop open to the public is Feb. 26 at 7:00 p.m. in 705 E. Main St. suite 7. The organization will also be at the Earth Action Day event in Chapel Hill in April.

Get Involved!

Residents of Chapel Hill and Carrboro can apply to become an Elite Pete and teach their own workshops. Training classes will be held in March for up to 10 people. Being an Elite Pete means:

- Attending 18 training hours spread out over a series of weekday sessions
- Teaching at least one do-it-yourself workshop a month between March and May

Applications due **Monday, Feb. 25, 2013**. Call 919-525-1405 or email wise@petestreet.org