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Get green for going green

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BY BILL FREEHLING
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The George Washington Regional Commission has started taking applications from area residents and contractors who want to participate in a local grant program to make older homes more energy efficient.

The program, called GW-HELP (Home Energy Loss Prevention), was enabled by a \$1 million grant the GWRC got last year from the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy. The funds were from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.



The program is primarily for Fredericksburg and Caroline County residents who make 50 to 120 percent of the area's median income and own single-family or mobile homes built before 2001.

If a home energy audit demonstrates that those residents can save at least 20 percent on their energy bills with various improvements, they can receive a rebate of up to \$6,000 of the cost of qualifying work through the grant program. Examples include new HVAC systems and water heaters, tuneups, new windows and doors, caulking, sealing, insulation and programmable thermostats.

Residents of Spotsylvania, Stafford, Caroline and Fredericksburg whose household income is more than 120 percent of the area's median can receive up to \$500 toward qualifying work. Members of that category also must own single-family or mobile homes built before 2001.

The Rappahannock Area Agency on Aging has a similar program for those whose incomes are less than 50 percent of the area's median (which differs based on the locality and number of people in the household).

The energy assessments and subsequent work must be done by contractors certified by the GWRC, which uses the standards of the Building Performance Institute. Certified contractors complete training (which is offered by Germanna Community College) and then pass a test.

The GWRC is working on a loan program that could help contractors and homeowners get financing for energy-efficiency work. That would extend the reach of the grant money, said Kevin Byrnes, who is director of regional planning for the GWRC and oversees the program.

Homeowners who participate in the program will have their subsequent energy bills reviewed to determine whether the expected savings were achieved.

The GWRC is developing a website for the program at gwhelp.org. A copy of applications and other program details can be found on the Business Browser blog on Fredericksburg.com.

Bill Freehling: 540/374-5405

Email: bfreehling@freelancestar.com

Affordable housing events are on schedule for area

The Central Virginia Housing Coalition is putting on the Fredericksburg region's first Affordable Housing Awareness Week this coming week. PNC Bank is underwriting the events.

Free forums focusing on how affordable housing affects the health, education, and quality of life of working-class families are scheduled throughout the week in the Fredericksburg region.

Those looking for more information should contact Kim McClellan, government affairs director for the Fredericksburg Area Association of Realtors, at 540/373-7711.

--Bill Freehling

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