

The Portland Observer

Sustainability



Cully Neighborhood Builds Green

Social, environment activists at work

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Cully neighborhood in northeast Portland will be getting a little bit more energy efficient thanks to the work of social and environmental activists.

The "Changing the Climate in Cully" initiative, sponsored by the Metropolitan Alliance for the Common Good—a network of 17 labor, faith, and community organizations—seeks to connect residents of the area with a program that will lower their energy bills while creating decent jobs.

Clean Energy Works Portland, a pilot program launched by the City of Portland, helps homeowners make upgrades to their houses that conserve energy, while lowering their energy bills and impact on the planet. Since last month, the activists have been working to connect residents of the Cully neighborhood with the program.

"We are not an environmental organization, we are a social justice organization," said Mary Nemmers, the lead organizer with the alliance.

Nemmers explained that her organization was particularly inter-

ested in Clean Energy Works Portland for several reasons. Workers who make houses more energy efficient do so by putting in new insulation, and better furnaces and water heaters. They also make living wages and receive health benefits while for doing the work, which is an aspect of the program that the alliance found appealing, according to Nemmers. The program has already created jobs for 17 people and sustained another 16.

Nemmers said that her organization targeted the neighborhood



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Event is free. Lunch will be provided. Translation and childcare available upon advanced request.



Jeremy Hays of the group Green for All reaches out to make the Cully Neighborhood more energy efficient and create new green jobs. Photo courtesy of Christian Columbres Photography.

because it has many houses that were built before 1995, and it also has many middle-income households. According to a survey conducted by the Cully Neighborhood Association in conjunction with researchers at Portland State University, 21 percent of residents in the neighborhood make between \$35,000 to \$49,000. Multnomah County has a weatherization program for low-income people, leaving little help for middle-income people.

"We knew that it was a neighborhood that didn't have a lot of targeted benefits," said Nemmers.

Homeowners who use the program can finance the costs of the energy upgrades by adding them onto their energy bill, which will decrease because their homes will use less energy.

Kathy Fuerstenau, the chair of the Cully Neighborhood Association, said the program is a great opportunity for residents, and the association has helped out by mentioning it in the association's newsletter. The association also helped sponsor a kick-off event for the campaign late last month

that drew 300 residents.

"We wanted a neighborhood-based approach," said Nemmers.

The Metropolitan Alliance for the Common Good has put door hangers on every door in the neighborhood promoting the program, and volunteers regularly canvass. An informational session is held every Tuesday from 7-8 p.m. at Riggler Elementary School.

Clean Energy Works Portland and the Changing the Climate in Cully initiative both had some help from Green for All, a national organization seeking to establish a green economy that will lift people out of poverty.

According to Jeremy Hays, director of special projects for Green for All, helped facilitate the stakeholder process with Clean Energy Works Portland, partnering it with it organizations that would help train and hire minority and disadvantaged people into jobs retrofitting houses.

Hays, who was in town for the Cully initiative kickoff, said that

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