

Learning about "being green"

by Margo Ashmore

Conserving energy and supplies makes a business more profitable or provides more money to invest in things like marketing or staff. Several agencies and programs can help figure out how to "be green" and finance the needed changes.

A room full of people with diverse business backgrounds got a taste of what's available, at a Northeast Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce-sponsored breakfast Nov. 9. They also got an ample and delicious Chowgirls breakfast, free.

Converting fluorescent-lighting from "T-12" to "T-8" and converting metal halide or incandescents to compact fluorescents make up the bulk of the Lighting Retrofit Program "One-Stop Efficiency ShopSM" offered by Center for Energy and Environment (CEE).

The agency's been helping small businesses for close to 30 years.

Speaker Kristin Funk of CEE said their free, no-obligation audit result in rebates of as much as \$625 per kilowatt saved, up to 60 percent of installation cost. There is below market rate financing (currently 3.9 percent) and the monthly loan payments match monthly energy savings. "Payback" is usually five years or less, she said. And, they can help convert a building in parts or phases.

Other sources of energy saving under this program are converting exit signs to LED, and installing motion sensors to turn off lights when a room is unoccupied for a while.

Speaking of turning off lights when leaving the room, Agatha Vaaler from the Food Service Energy Leadership Program at the Green Institute talked about many no-cost and low-cost behavior efficiencies (like what our parents taught us) that food businesses can implement. Along Lake Street, they issued an "energy challenge" to see who could save the most, among six participating businesses.

The owner/chef teams were "nimble," she said, able to make changes quickly. "Customer experience is the priority," so they carefully tested anything that might impact the customer. For example, many restaurants operate their exhaust fans continuously for fear that odors and moisture will build up. The winning business discovered that the fans could be turned off in less-busy hours and used when something is cooking.

Much can be saved by simply placing appliances completely under the exhaust hood. Fat frying temperatures can often be reduced. Other big categories of savings, Vaaler said, were:

- good air flow around evaporator motors (so they don't work so hard)
- replace T-12 bulbs with T-8's (as above)
- proper defrosting, rather than wasting running cold water
- install low-flow pre-rinse valves (the water that rinses large food particles off of dishes before they're put in the dishwasher)
- "night shades" (covers) for open coolers when the business is closed.

If chosen for the program, participating businesses pay \$200 to get the site assessment, which provides the baseline. The Green Institute program staff work with them for a year to effect a 10-15 percent energy savings target (the winning business on Lake Street exceeded this). The service is a \$5,000 value, Vaaler said. Her contact info is: Agatha Vaaler, avaaler@greeninstitute.org, 612-278-7142.

Eureka Recycling had a display at the meeting promoting restaurants composting their waste. CenterPoint Energy's Al Swintek talked about low-cost energy audits for businesses that help determine the most practical savings.

To finance certain improvements, a business can use the City of Minneapolis Energy Efficiency Revolving Loan Fund. Eligible improvements include:

- Lighting technology upgrades
- Ventilation control optimization
- Addition of programmable controls
- Heating, cooling, service hot water and insulation
- Through-the-wall A/C upgrades

Other improvements that reduce energy use. Contacts for this program are:

- Jim Hasnik, Center for Energy and Environment, 612-335-5885, jhasnik@mncee.org
- Kelly Hoffman, City of Minneapolis, 612-673-5079 kelly.hoffman@ci.minneapolis.mn.us
- Becky Shaw, City of Minneapolis, 612-673-5066 becky.shaw@ci.minneapolis.mn.us

Some of the presentation materials from the Chamber meeting, which was co-sponsored by Xcel Energy, the City of Minneapolis, and the Green Institute, are available online at minneapolischamber.org/negreen.htm.

The Chamber received a City of Minneapolis Climate Change grant using federal American Recovery Act funds to help with this and other future programming. For information on membership in the Northeast Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, call Executive Director Christine Levens at 612-378-0050.