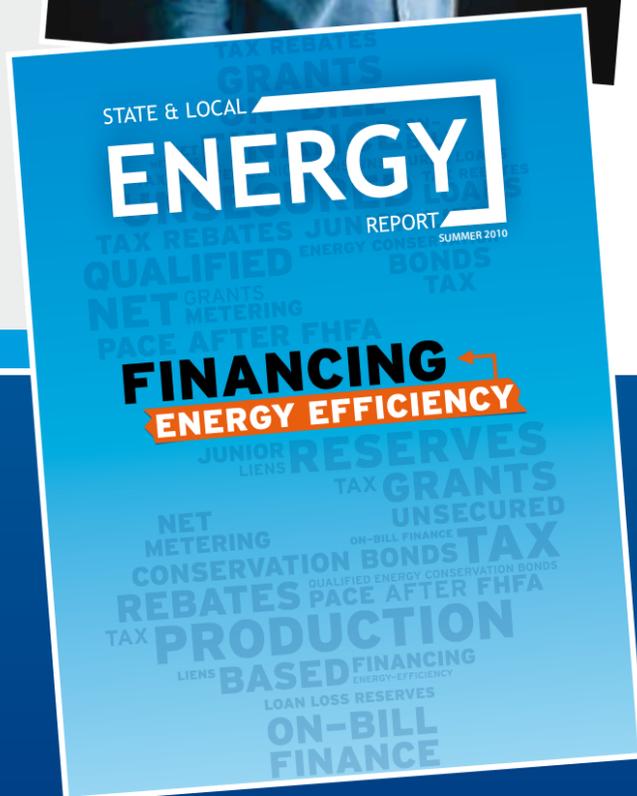
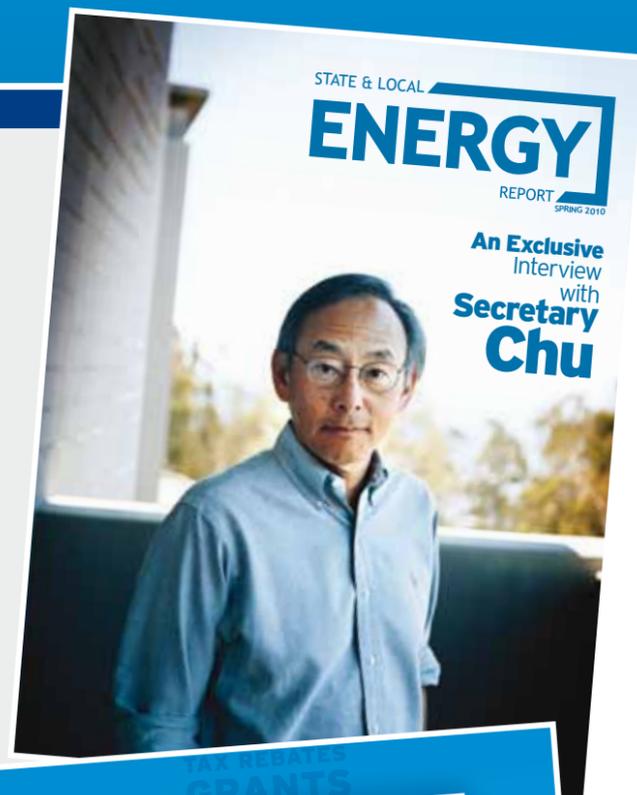


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Eric Lopez of Veterans Green Jobs inspects the crawlspace where a new furnace has been installed. Photo by Brian Brainerd

Veterans put to work helping low-income Families in Colorado

Veterans working to help low-income families reduce their energy bills and make their homes cleaner and healthier. Sound like a dream? Thanks to Veterans Green Jobs, this scenario takes place every day across the state of Colorado.

by The National Association for State Community Services Programs

Founded in 2008, Veterans Green Jobs is a Denver -based nonprofit organization that provides green jobs, education, transition support, and career development opportunities for military veterans. The organization understood that veterans returning from overseas posts such as Iraq and Afghanistan would need assistance transitioning back into civilian life in Colorado, particularly when it came to job placement. Veterans Green Jobs stepped in to help these veterans find meaningful employment in growing

fields, providing the same sense of service that led many of them to join the armed forces in the first place.

Now in its second year, Veterans Green Jobs has a number of programs successfully employing veterans throughout the state of Colorado and the Southwest. The Veterans Green Corps program, in conjunction with the Southwest Conservation Corps, trains and places veterans in land conservation methods such as forest thinning and land management. The Veterans City Canopy program works



Jordan Latva. Photo by Linda Lidov

with transitioning homeless veterans on the Mile High Million program, aimed at planting a million trees in Denver by 2025. As of August 2012, thirty-five Veterans City Canopy crew members will have planted 4,600 trees in Denver yards.

One of the most successful programs at Veterans Green Jobs is the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). With their focus on green jobs, the organization seized the opportunity to expand into the WAP early this year, winning an \$11.8 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant from the Colorado Governor's Energy Office. It now employs veterans to weatherize low-income households in Denver and Jefferson counties as well as the San Luis Valley, one of the poorest in the state. In Denver and Jefferson counties alone, Veterans Green Jobs has created thirty-two jobs, eighteen of which are held by veterans.

Sergeant Jordan Latva is one of those veterans. Wounded in Fallujah, Iraq, in 2004, the career Marine officer realized for the first time that he would have to find a job after retiring from the service in 2005. "I didn't have a clue as to what I wanted to do," he said. "I didn't know how to go about changing my resume from military to civilian terms." He learned about Veterans Green Jobs through a Veteran Affairs representative at a community college and was sold. The organization provided Jordan with training at an accredited education program in home energy auditing and weatherization, as well as employment placement opportunities. Today, Jordan works with low-income families in Denver and Jefferson counties to help them

understand the low-energy measures placed in their homes. "I joined this [program] not knowing anything about 'green,'" he remarked. "Learning about energy efficiency, and doing community outreach to help others be more aware, has been an eye opener."

According to Garrett Reppenhagen, Director of Programs for Veterans Green Jobs, positions like Jordan's



A Veterans Green Jobs weatherization crew member blows installation into a homeowner's attic. Photo by Brian Brainerd

are "ideal for vets coming out of the military. Vets have a lot of great soft skills and a strong work ethic . . . work well under pressure in diverse conditions, work as a team, and have an incredible sense of service. Coming out of the war zone, this is a terrific way to help vets continue giving a service to the country by helping fellow Americans save money on their energy bill and save energy for the nation."

Eric Lopez, a former Marine, is another such individual. Eric learned about the weatherization work done by Veterans Green Jobs as a recipient of their services. After being laid off from the construction industry in 2009, Eric reflected on his positive experience with the Veterans Green Jobs crew

and the extraordinary reduction in his home heating bills—almost \$140 a month—and decided to enroll in an energy efficiency program at Red Rocks Community College. "I saw how energy was taking the forefront of the economy. Any job that had to do with anything important was a green job," Eric said. Today, he works as a training manager for Veterans

Green Jobs' Weatherization Services program.

Seeking to reproduce stories like Jordan's and Eric's, Veterans Green Jobs has teamed up with the Governor's Energy Office and the Colorado Community College system to create technical weatherization and energy training centers in the state's community colleges. This initiative helps both veterans returning home as well as students who receive training in the growing green job sector. The Governor's Energy Office is likewise looking to the future for ways to sustain the current level of weatherization services after the ARRA funding is spent. One option being aggressively pursued is "fee-for-service"

There are a lot of steps you can take when weatherizing homes, but the first should be to your Ford Dealership.



The Ford Weatherization Truck Incentive Program has been established to provide truck discounts for all agencies participating in the Recovery Act weatherization program. This incentive covers much of the Ford vehicle lineup, many of which are flexible-fuel vehicles (FFV) that operate on E85 ethanol and even B20 biodiesel. So whatever combination of capable, fuel-efficient and green vehicles you may need, you'll have access to them.

Complete program details, plus the list of all eligible Ford vehicles, can be found at wapbuyinggroup.com/ford. To enroll, contact 1-800-34-FLEET, apply for your Ford Fleet identification number (FIN), and visit your local Ford Dealer today.



fleet.ford.com

weatherization programs, which would fund low-income projects throughout the state.

“I can’t say enough about how much the State of Colorado has supported us,” remarked Tamara Ellentuck, Executive Director of the Weatherization Program for Veterans Green Jobs in San Luis County. “They have been very progressive in looking and planning ahead to sustain these jobs and this program after the

Recovery Act money is spent.”

The Colorado Governor’s Energy Office and Veterans Green Jobs are working to make a tangible difference in their community. Vince Ingram, a twenty-year Air Force veteran who found his way to Veterans Green Jobs after being laid off from the banking industry in 2009, summed it up best: “In my banking job, I supervised people I never saw. I missed the camaraderie after I left the Air Force. The work

at Veterans Green Jobs would allow me to help low-income families, put vets back to work, and help green the economy and the environment.”

This is, in essence, what Veteran Green Jobs is about: helping our veterans to find meaningful employment assisting low-income families while simultaneously improving the environment and reducing our dependence on foreign oil. ■

Stimulus money creating jobs in Michigan

Ken Lipps, an experienced journeyman machine repairman, spent 18 months unemployed as a result of the recession. After hearing about the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), which provides low-income households with energy efficiency improvements, Ken contacted his local agency to learn more. He trained to become a home energy auditor, and now audits four to six homes a week. Recently he was promoted to a program operations manager, overseeing other auditors in the field. Ken’s training as an energy auditor translated into a full-time job in a growing industry helping low-income families in Michigan reduce their energy bills and make their homes healthier. He fully supports the WAP and reminds friends skeptical of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that “weatherization services benefit you as much as it benefits the people we help . . . [since] each home that is weatherized is one more that reduces our dependence on foreign oil.”

This is just one story of many from ARRA’s support of the Michigan economy. The recent recession struck Michigan particularly hard. Deeply dependent on Detroit auto manufacturing, the sharp decrease in consumer spending on new cars rocked the state’s economy. The highly publicized federal bailouts of Daimler-Chrysler and General Motors—once seen as pillars of the American and Michigan economies—prevented the total collapse of the state’s economy but did little to increase production or employment. Unemployment

skyrocketed as plants lay idle or closed. Detroit’s official unemployment rate exceeded 30 percent in late 2009, while Michigan’s overall unemployment rate reached more than 14 percent in 2010, considerably higher than the national average of 10 percent.

Although the auto bailouts failed to increase employment, the WAP is creating jobs in Michigan. The WAP has been active in Michigan since its inception in 1976. Created to assist low-income families who lack resources to invest in energy efficiency, the program uses funds to improve the

energy efficiency of low-income homes using the most advanced technologies and testing protocols available in the housing industry. One of the most active WAP local agencies working in Michigan today is the Community Action Agency (CAA) in Michigan’s Jackson, Lenawee, and Hillsdale counties. Since 1976, the agency has weatherized more than 6,000 homes.

ARRA provided Michigan and the CAA with unprecedented resources to expand their work in helping low-income families receive weatherization services. Originally

contracted to weatherize 800 homes in three years, their crews accomplished the work in one. The state awarded the CAA an additional performance grant through March 2012 as a result of the high quality and efficiency of their work. The CAA hopes to complete over 1,700 homes by then, essentially compressing 15 years of work into two and a half.

To reach these production levels, the CAA had to augment significantly every aspect of its program. It hired new crews to keep pace with demand for weatherization services and trained new weatherization workers. Individuals received new training and certification as home energy auditors and in lead safe practices. In total, the CAA has created more than ninety jobs for local contractors, crews, and auditors in the last 18 months, helping to spur economic growth.

Ken’s story of becoming part of the new green workforce as a result of Recovery Act spending is not unique. Al Hulshof of HMS Builders has worked as a licensed contractor for the CAA for over nine years. Throughout the early part of the decade, Al worked with a small crew of one or two individuals to weatherize on average six houses a month. Since the Recovery Act, Al has been able to hire three additional workers, weatherizing on average fifteen to twenty homes a month. This has created not only new jobs, Al notes, but also helps the local economy as HMS buys new water heaters, furnaces, and windows for its projects. Al’s ability to expand his own crew has also helped a greater number of low-income families, who will now have a warmer, more energy efficient home this winter.

The success of the CAA and WAP has not escaped the notice of Washington, D.C. “Weatherization efforts in our community over the past year have provided much needed jobs for workers here,” said Congressman Mark Schauer (D-MI). “Home weatherization is a common sense way to reduce energy usage, and provides direct relief to American families who are hardest hit by high utility bills.”



Congressman Schauer speaks with General Contractor Tim Vandenburg as he dense packs a sidewall with one-hole tubing method. Photo courtesy of CAA

The CAA has proven that workers armed with new, “green economy” skill sets can thrive if given the opportunity. As Marsha Kreucher, CEO of CAA remarked, Recovery Act funding “supported the hiring of more than 100 workers from the community . . . who have completed training and received certifications in fields that have viable, high-wage, and high-demand futures. More simply, we are training workers for the future of America.” These workers, in turn, spur economic growth as goods such as furnaces and water heaters are replaced, all from local sources. Although the number of jobs

created by this trickle-down effect is difficult to measure, by buying locally the CAA is supporting a number of small businesses that may have otherwise closed.

Additionally, the more than 800 homes weatherized by the CAA have benefited from an average reduction in energy costs of 35 percent. The money that would have otherwise gone to utility bills can now be spent on other

goods and services. The Recovery Act and the hard work of the CAA made this possible. As Kreucher noted, “We see firsthand the profound impact these funds have had locally. We are keeping seniors warm and helping unemployed workers and young families pay their bills. . . . The economic crisis in Michigan touched many who never imagined they would ever need help. We all have the same fear, which is that tomorrow might not be as good as yesterday. We are helping to make that fear go away. We are working to do our part to support a thriving community.” ■