

6th Annual Energy Awareness Expo

Nearly 3,000 people made their way to the Salvation Army gym on 27th Avenue West for the sixth annual Energy Awareness Expo, where they learned how to save energy and apply for heating assistance while enjoying lunch. In addition to the meal and the practical information given out, approximately 950 energy-saving kits were distributed to help those who attended the Expo start the winter season with greater awareness about how they use energy, and some new tools to save it.

Sponsored by the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA), Minnesota Power, ComfortSystems and the Salvation Army, the Energy Expo has grown to become the largest event of its type held in Minnesota, according to Martin Lepak, the AEOA's weatherization manager. "A major component of this event is to encourage individuals who've not received energy assistance in the past to apply for heating assistance," Lepak said. Households with annual incomes of \$21,682 (single person) on a sliding scale up to \$55,072 for a six-person household qualify for financial help with energy bills. Minnesota Power's Al Lian, who's been involved in the Expo since its inception, said invitations to the Expo were sent to about 3,800 income-eligible homes in the Duluth and Hermantown zip codes. Energy-saving kits distributed contained compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs), light emitting diode (LED) holiday lights, a refrigerator thermometer, faucet



Expo inspires low-income families to save energy.

aerators, and brushes for cleaning refrigerator coils. Staff answered questions about saving energy and money, billing, and payment options from many of the customers who trooped through the gym. “We see this Expo as a great opportunity to bring folks in the community together to learn how to get the most out of their energy dollar through our conservation programs,” said Koecher, administrator of the company’s Conservation Improvement Program. “It’s also a way to connect those in need with the service providers and agencies that can help them out during the cold winter months through assistance programs and budget billing options. All of this great information comes with a nice warm meal to fill their bellies.” If the participants in the Expo use the components in Minnesota Power’s home energy kits to full potential, the estimated 950 kits distributed will yield a savings of over 336,000 kilowatt-hours of energy, according to Senior Minnesota Power Conservation Marketing Analyst George Agriesti’s calculations. “This is energy enough to power 31 homes for a year, \$27,823 dollars in avoided energy costs, or 353 tons of carbon dioxide saved,” he noted. “That’s equivalent to taking 71 cars off the road.” In a side room adjacent to the gym, Barbara Spongberg of east Duluth

chatted with a friend while lingering over a cup of coffee. She said she’d attended Energy Expos in the past, and looked forward to the energy-saving ideas and gifts as well as the meal. Another diner sitting nearby, Harley Blake, said he’d been receiving Social Security for several years but didn’t learn he qualified for energy assistance until last year. “About 90 percent of the lights in my home are CFLs,” Blake said. “I’ve been doing quite a bit to try and save energy. My electric bill has gone from about \$45 a month to \$25.” Serina Massie of Duluth brought her parents, Pam and Craig Massie, and her sons Kayson, 3, and Joel, 7, to the Expo. The boys strolled patiently in line as their mom talked with representatives of ComfortSystems, Minnesota Power and AEOA before lining up for lunch. Kayson bided his time with a Tootsie Roll until he sat down for his meal. “Anything that will help us save a little money is a good deal by me,” Pam Massie said as the family gathered up energy kits, brochures and coloring books to leave.