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## Groups team up for energy makeover

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Usually when a family receives an energy efficiency audit on a home, the family applies for the audit with the Ozarks Area Community Action Corp., OACAC Supervisor Lisa Zimmerman said. With Doug and Sally Ward, foster and adoptive parents, the process worked in reverse when family services contacted her office.

"They said, 'They're really good people trying to help kids out,'" Zimmerman said. "I think Sally thought I was crazy. I said, 'We want to come into your house.'"

The energy efficiency audit the Wards received was not like that of the other 65 homes in Polk County that receive the audit through OACAC. For this audit, OACAC teamed up with Southwest Electric Cooperative and Southwest Baptist University's Students in Free Enterprise.

"OACAC has to stay within federal guidelines for the program," Zimmerman said. "That's not necessarily everything the family or home needs."

SIFE members can donate sweat equity by completing projects the audit wouldn't otherwise address and Southwest Electric Cooperative uses the partnership to help income-eligible families and to raise awareness of its weatherization program for all eligible Southwest Electric Cooperative members.

Mark Goss with OACAC said the weatherization process normally takes less than 30 days.

"This is for everybody," said Ted Zeugin, member services representative and communications coordinator for Southwest Electric. "Cooperatives and Community Action teamed up to get to income-eligible people. This is for all. We're going to throw money into this. If we get money into this, it gets people to the front of the line."

Doug Ward said his family thought Zimmerman's call was a joke at first, since the process was more or less in reverse. But the call came at a crucial time for the family. Doug lost his job after he and Sally raised four children, adopted three children and fostered many more — about 50 in total.

"I've tried to do most of this stuff myself," Doug said. "This has been a very bad year. First time I've been out of work in my life since I was 14."

The children, ranging in age from 6 to 17, have chores around the home, like cutting firewood or helping in the hay field in the summer. Though the home is heated with firewood in a basement furnace, the kids sometimes get chilly and Sally notices drafts in several places.

"This cold spot coming into the basement blows into the kitchen," she said.

The family's electric bill can be as high as \$300 a month, Sally said.

"We should be able to reduce that by quite a bit," Zimmerman said.

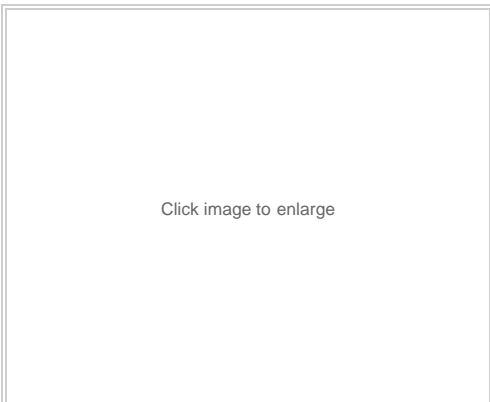
Missing duct work and broken windows in the basement are a few key areas for improvement, Zeugin said.

"Just fixing the duct work is going to make a big difference," Zeugin said. "If we can get this all hooked back up, it's going to make an unbelievable difference. This wood heat is blowing into a basement with a broken window."

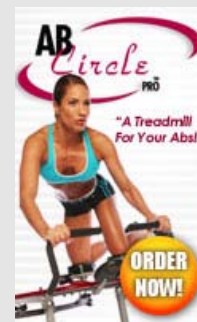
Damaged pieces of siding that are brittle might not withstand power washing, Zimmerman said.

"These kinds of things are SIFE projects," she said.

Justin Wessels, SIFE project leader, said his team would learn during the audit as well, looking for ways to help make the home more energy efficient. After a thorough inspection of possible problem areas, the house is sealed off. Windows and exterior doors are closed tight. A blower door, or large fan positioned at one exterior door, draws air out of the house.



Staff Photo/Sarah West Sally Ward, 11-year-old Justin Ward and Billy Hunt with Southwest Electric examine some possible sources of energy loss.



"It shows where all the cracks, leaks and energy deficiencies are in the house," Wessels said.

The audit helps to assess the cost of giving the home an energy makeover.

Zeugin and Billy Hunt with Southwest Electric Cooperative spot a loose outlet in the Wards' dining room — a space heater plugged in there has a blackened end on it and is a potential fire hazard. A window in the girls' bedroom doesn't shut completely.

When the blower door is turned on, the fan draws the cold air through the cracks, and several places throughout the home become obvious sources of heat loss.

Though Southwest Electric Cooperative completed about 115 energy audits in 2009, the cooperative felt it was missing low-income families, which led to the cooperative teaming up with OACAC.

"I think we're going to be able to do some big things here," Zeugin said. "These lower-income eligible people can be able to take advantage of this program. We're reaching mainly people that are on the ball. We keep missing these lower-income folks."

Todd Steinmann, program director for OACAC's weatherization department, added that interested families should contact OACAC first.

"We prefer them going to a neighborhood center so they can see other resources available," Steinmann said.

For more information, contact OACAC at 326-6276.

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