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NY readies energy-efficiency lending

Contractors, nonprofits alike stand to gain from program

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Joseph Malcarne, with customer Janet Jaeger at Malcarne Contracting in Rhinebeck on Saturday, is both excited and anxious about a state energy-efficiency program that will kick off this spring.

Times Herald-Record/DOMINICK FIORILLE

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By John Sullivan

Times Herald-Record

Posted: February 08, 2010 - 2:00 AM

Rhinebeck — Contractor Joe Malcarne entered the home energy performance business six years ago, when the concept of energy efficiency didn't even exist in most people's minds.

Within the last two years, however, he's had to hire six workers to manage the growth of his home energy performance unit, about the same number of laborers he laid off from his construction crews in the same time period.

Few people are thus as heartened or as anxious as Malcarne about New York state's plan to make a million homes more energy-efficient within the next five years.

"In my opinion, this will open the floodgates," Malcarne said.

It's a little talked-about program called Green Jobs/Green New York meant to reduce the energy costs of New Yorkers by \$1 billion a year, as well as get hammers flying again in the stalled building industry.

And if it works out, Malcarne will be a very rich man.

That's because homeowners and businesses are expected to leap at the construction loans — up to \$13,000 for homeowners, \$26,000 for commercial building owners — which they'll pay back at no interest. They should ultimately see a net gain through energy savings from tightening up homes or adding solar panels.

Tradesmen and nonprofits needed to administer the program are eager to get started, hoping that the program will create 14,000 jobs.

Requests for proposals go out in March to choose 10 community-based organizations, or CBOs, that will run the program throughout the state.

Mike Dunleavy, the weatherization director for the Regional Economic Community Action Program, or RECAP, in Middletown, said he would need 20 new employees to handle the paperwork if his nonprofit gets chosen as a CBO. "This would really grow our organization," he said.

The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority will use financing leveraged with \$112 million of seed money to set up a revolving-door loan for the program.

Some, however, have reservations about the way the program, to be launched this spring, is progressing.

Malcarne worries that trade unions, jockeying for a piece of the pie, will take over the program and send out poorly trained workers who fail to achieve the energy savings promised to customers.

He proposes taking more time to train building analysts, as well as allowing nonunion companies, like his, an equal footing in the market, he said.

"We have done (energy-efficiency work) for hundreds of buildings," he said.

"When we say it's not just something you can pick up in a few weeks, we know what we're talking about."

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