

State official reviews Fayette work

By: AMY REVAK Herald Standard

The secretary of the state Department of Community and Economic Development visited Uniontown Wednesday to get a firsthand look at how \$4 million in federal economic stimulus money for the Fayette County weatherization program is being spent.

The program is administered through the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority.

DCED Secretary George E. Cornelius, who is visiting different areas throughout the state, stopped and took a tour at 39 Maurice St., where upgrades such as a new furnace, basement door and gas line replacement are being completed. Attic work also is slated for the yellow home, which sits along a tidy street in the city.

Cornelius said energy education is important to everyone. He said although the money is provided to people who fall within 200 percent of poverty level and lower to make homes more energy-efficient, everyone can learn and be educated in how to save energy.

"Our objective is to make sure this program is a success in Pennsylvania. We want to reduce energy consumption and to create jobs," Cornelius said.

The state program will create 1,000 direct jobs, Cornelius said. He said plans are also to train people so they can get jobs as the economy becomes reinvigorated.

Locally, the program is creating several jobs.

With the extra money, the redevelopment authority has given three full-time employees new positions and raises and made six part-time installers full time.

Jeffries said additional part-time installers likely would be hired soon, as well as another auditor and crew leader.

Cornelius said Pennsylvania is receiving \$252 million in weatherization funding and will be making 30,000 houses in the state more energy-efficient.

Fayette County Redevelopment Authority executive director Andrew French previously said the authority is receiving \$4,046,454 over the next two years to weatherize homes of low-income people.

Weatherization director Al Jeffries said the boost is quadruple the authority's annual allocation for the program and 530 families will benefit from the money.

The authority will continue to receive the annual allocation as well.

French said the normal yearly allocation is about \$500,000, but this year it is closer to \$1 million.

Jeffries previously said applicants are chosen that have higher utility usage. He said the authority provides energy education to everyone that is served.

Jeffries said all homeowners who benefit from the program receive carbon monoxide detectors and fluorescent light bulbs.

Cornelius said everyone of every income level could learn how to save energy, adding that an energy audit is a good way to determine how to become more energy efficient.

Earlier this week, state Sen. Rich Kasunic D-Dunbar, announced that help is available for all Pennsylvanians trying to stay warm this winter.

Kasunic said the Department of Environmental Protection's "Turn Down, Seal Off, Save Up" initiative offers energy conservation tips and resources for finding financial assistance with utility bills.

Kasunic said a home energy audit could calculate how much energy is being used, whether or not it is being used efficiently and can reveal ways to make a home more energy-efficient. Homeowners can perform a simple energy audit themselves, or they can hire a trained professional to do a more thorough evaluation.

According to Kasunic, homeowners who choose to perform their own audit can easily spot places that allow warm air to escape and cold air to enter the home, for example drafty windows and doors. He added that adding weather stripping to windows and doors, replacing incandescent light bulbs with energy-efficient, compact fluorescent bulbs would lead to immediate savings of energy and money.

A more thorough evaluation may find less obvious sources of energy loss, such as insufficient insulation. A professional audit may also recommend upgrading antiquated heating systems, replacing inefficient appliances with ENERGY STAR units, installing storm windows and doors and replacing old water heaters.

"No family should be left in the cold this winter," Kasunic said. "A home energy audit, along with simple, inexpensive ways to reduce energy

consumption, can save residents hundreds of dollars on their winter utility bills and keep homes safe and warm."

For additional energy saving tips, and for information on financial assistance with utility bills, visit online at www.TurnSealSave.org.

December 03, 2009