

Money savings through efficient energy use

Programs help people conserve

Michael McLaughlin
The Aspen Times

Susan Terra loves her home in the North 40 neighborhood near the Aspen-Pitkin County Airport. It's a log home that she designed and had built in 2001 by the same company that built her first log home in Basalt in 1995.

But when winter kicked in, the new home wasn't nearly as warm or as energy-efficient as her first home.

"The Basalt home had a great southern exposure," Terra said. "That house was always toasty. In this home, it's much different. Over time, the logs have changed shape slightly and split with some small cracks. There's no drywall or fiberglass insulation used; it's just an 8-inch log, and I don't have the same southern exposure here. My baseboard heaters couldn't keep up in the winter. My home was usually around 62 degrees, and who needs that?"

After Terra saw ads from the Community Office for Resource Efficiency, or CORE, and from Grid Alternatives, two non-profits that promote the use



GRID ALTERNATIVES/COURTESY PHOTO

A crew from Grid Alternatives sets up the infrastructure for solar panels on the roof of Susan Terra's home in the North 40 neighborhood. With the work done through Grid Alternatives and the Community Office for Resource Efficiency, Terra is saving around \$3,000 a year on energy costs.

of renewable energy and solar technology, she was on her way to saving about \$3,000 a year on her energy bills.

"Both programs are ridiculously great," Terra said. "Now my home is warm and cozy."

Terra started with CORE, as it was offering a \$300 energy-efficiency test for \$50 that identified areas that were losing heat in her home. The efficiency specialist showed Terra where the problem spots were and advised

her to contact CORE for some repair options.

CORE supplied Terra with repair materials and provided instruction on how to install the materials. She insulated pipes; sealed and caulked doors, windows and floor gaps; filled gaps on the logs; and also insulated all the switch plates.

After she informed CORE about the work she had done, a specialist returned and did another inspection, followed by

a surprise.

"They said I qualified for several energy-related rebates worth several hundred dollars," Terra said. "I was then able to buy a small gas fireplace. The CORE program was a game-changer, and the fireplace was the icing on the cake. Now, people describe my home as cozy all the time. I went from paying \$300 in winter heating bills to about half to one-third of that."

This past year, Terra again saw a newspaper ad for CORE and noticed that it had an affiliation with Grid Alternatives out of Denver, offering solar equipment and free installation to a limited number of families that qualified in the valley.

Terra fit the criteria and is now working with Grid as it installs the solar infrastructure and panels to her roof. Grid coordinates certified solar trainees or students who volunteer to work for experience under the guidance of certified solar installers.

"They do everything for free," Terra said. "It's unbelievable. They told me when it's up and running that the solar panels will mitigate up to 75 percent of my electric bill."

Emily Birk is the outreach coordinator for the Colorado branch of Grid and grew up in Basalt. She said Grid has been ramping up the program with

CORE so that solar power has a larger impact in the valley.

"Anyone can apply that fits within our basic requirements," Birk said. We're looking to grow a bigger program with both our participants and partners to help make it happen."

The current requirements for the solar program state that the applicant must own and live in the proposed home, that the household income must be below 80 percent of the county median income, which varies by county, and that the home must have a solar-appropriate roof.

"It's really like a classroom environment on the roof," Birk said. "It's a real community engagement to make it happen."

As Terra has worked with CORE and Grid, she says her mindset has changed toward energy efficiency. She's now constantly thinking of ways to become more efficient, as is her 9-year-old son, Aidan Flynn, who also helped with repairs whenever he could.

"As a parent, it's critical to set a good example," Terra said. "This has been a fantastic learning opportunity for me and my son. It's just another reason why I want to spread the word on how amazing the CORE and Grid programs are."

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