



Case Study: Alpine Bank, Rifle

By Suzie Romig/CLEER Correspondent



Banker Finds Energy Efficiency Upgrades Make Good Economic Sense

As a successful community banker for 21 years, Alpine Bank's Jay Rickstrew has learned a thing or two about smart, conservative investing.

So when it came time to invest in his aging bank building on Fourth Street in downtown Rifle, he measured life-cycle costs for equipment options and considered long-term energy prices. The banker ran the numbers on an upgrade of the heating and cooling equipment in the building, originally constructed decades ago as First National Bank.

"What spurred it in the beginning was the HVAC is very old and very inefficient, and we would have to replace it anyway," Rickstrew said. "What I looked at was if we are going to replace it, let's do it the

right way. Let's do it as energy efficient as possible, and let's offset some of the (energy) costs."

Rickstrew phased the cost of upgrades after tracking positive savings. The priorities were determined through a commercial energy audit completed in spring 2008 by Schmueser Gordon Meyer engineers in Glenwood Springs. The first step was to make the building envelope for the 8,800-square-foot bank as tight as possible so new heating and cooling units could be sized appropriately and run effectively.

In February the bank management invested \$20,500 in a large insulation and air sealing project completed by a regional vendor that improved the roof insulation factor from a leaky R-11 to a tight R-49. The project received a \$5,000 rebate through the Garfield Clean Energy Challenge for Business (www.GarfieldCleanEnergy.org under the "Commercial" tab). The Challenge is a project of the Garfield Clean Energy, a countywide collaboration of nine local governments, with management and energy coaching provided by the nonprofit Clean Energy Economy for the Re-



John Evans, Alpine Bank facilities officer, reviews work from a large insulation and air sealing project that improved the roof insulation factor from a leaky R-11 to a tight R-49. Photos by Todd Patrick

gion (CLEER).

"The CLEER energy coaches proved very valuable," said John Evans, Alpine Bank's facilities officer. "They offered their considerable ex-

The Upgrades

- Insulation and air-sealing were improved
- The HVAC system was overhauled
- Large Airius fan added in the lobby
- Motion-controlled lighting
- Tankless hot water heater

Lessons Learned

- The better air conditioning makes the bank more appealing and improves worker satisfaction
- Energy audits are key to identifying specific upgrades
- \$900 savings in utility costs in eight months
- Many more upgrades can still be implemented



Above left: Working with customers at her desk in the lobby is more comfortable for Alpine Bank employee Marcia Smith following energy efficiency upgrades to the older building. Right: Alpine Bank employee Karrie Fletcher said the recent energy efficiency updates to the downtown Rifle building have made a noticeable difference in keeping the lobby and offices more temperature controlled. Left: The installation of a powerful-but-quiet Airius brand fan in the tall entrance of the bank lobby moves air trapped near the ceiling throughout the lobby.

perience with energy upgrades and what areas to work on first.”

Another key step was the installation of an Airius brand fan attached to the ceiling of the tall entrance area in the bank lobby. The powerful but quiet blower—technically known as a “thermal and humidity destratification fan”—forcefully moves air trapped near the high ceiling throughout the lobby. Bank employees such as Karrie Fletcher and Marcia Smith said the fan and insulation have made a noticeable difference in keeping the lobby and their offices more comfortable.

The upgrades lowered energy use and saved \$900 in utility costs in the eight months, Evans noted. Gas usage was reduced by 20 percent

during the late winter months and electricity use was 10 percent lower during the summer compared to the previous year.

Evans said energy use has been tracked at all Alpine Bank buildings since 2006 in the company’s effort to reduce consumption by 20 percent by 2012.

Next steps planned at the downtown Rifle branch includes the installation of high efficiency, modern equipment including: 96 percent efficient hot water condensing boilers, 15.6 SEER roof-top air conditioners, an energy management system and new return air ducting instead of return air through a plenum space.

The bank president said the building’s current boiler is “only 60 to 70 percent efficient and the size of a Volkswagen,” but he is aiming higher to save energy.

“It doesn’t cost you that much

more to go from 80 percent efficient to 96 percent. If my numbers work, it’s not going to cost me anything” to chose the highest efficiency boiler, Rickstrew said.

Evans said other upgrades in the past five years include efficient and motion-controlled lighting and a tankless hot water heater. All the upgrades had to measure up in a banker’s calculations.

“The numbers don’t lie for what we’ve already done,” Rickstrew said. “I anticipate (the rest) will be worthwhile or I wouldn’t be doing it.”

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