



Case Study: Sunnyside Retirement Center

Glenwood Springs, Colorado By Suzie Romig, CLEER



Seniors, Staff Find ‘Fantastic’ Energy Savings at Sunnyside

They wouldn’t use a hip term such as “green team,” but many seniors living at Sunnyside Retirement Center in Glenwood Springs are environmentalists all the same.

The residents recycle. They encourage fellow residents to try compact fluorescent light bulbs. They gather articles about environmental issues for the maintenance manager. They turn down the thermostat at night and when they leave their units.

Resident Dick Watkins, 73, said he walks the multi-story building around 8:30 p.m. each night shutting windows and turning off fans in common areas.

The Upgrades

- Replaced inefficient, original boilers with two new 93 percent efficient boilers and two high-tech indirect water heaters.
- Improved attic insulation
- Sealed air leaks with caulk and foam
- Replaced leaky and fogged windows
- Upgraded to more efficient lighting inside and out

Grace Schick, 80, is an avid gardener who facilitated the donation of four raised gardening beds, plants, and funds to support the seniors growing vegetables. Louis Logan, 76, gathers compostable materials to take to the Glenwood Springs Recycling Center each week.

All of these eco-conscious seniors are enthusiastic about the energy savings at Sunnyside these days. After significant energy upgrades were completed last year with the help of the nonprofit Clean Energy Economy for the Region (CLEER), Sunnyside administrators recorded \$1,549 in electricity savings in nine months and an impressive \$4,976 in natural gas savings in seven months.

“It’s fantastic. I think everyone should save as much energy as possible,” said Logan, as he showed off the center’s recycling carts. “I don’t like waste. I don’t like spending money needlessly.”

With seniors and disabled residents on fixed incomes, keeping the center’s expenses in check is important. The 25-year-old center is



Left: Sunnyside Maintenance Manager Dean Crabb checks a setting on the two new 93 percent efficient boilers in the main building. Photos by Suzie Romig

managed by Garfield County Senior Housing Services and functions as a break-even operation. Rents include utilities and range from \$398 for an economy unit to \$691 for a two-bedroom apartment in the 53-unit complex.

Sunnyside Finance Manager Margie Trebesh said the monthly savings in utility costs will allow for

Lessons Learned

- Energy upgrades have made residents more comfortable
- All citizens can work on upgrades to use less energy
- **\$1,549 in electricity savings in nine months and \$4,976 in natural gas savings in seven months**



Left: Sunnyside resident and volunteer Louis Logan breaks down compostable materials in the center's recycling closet. Right: The center's exterior.

needed repairs in the aging building. "There's no question that it's fantastic," Trebesh said. "We are able to do further improvements; for example, plumbing fixtures have started to wear out."

The administrative team at Sunnyside—Trebesh, Director Marti Duprey and Maintenance Manager Dean Crabb—worked closely with staff at CLEER and the International Center for Appropriate & Sustainable Technology (iCAST) to complete a series of energy improvements with funding from a variety of sources. The project included replacing the inefficient, original boilers in the 37,080-square-foot main building with two new 93 percent efficient boilers and two high-tech indirect water heaters. Other work included repairing and upgrading attic insulation, sealing attic air leaks with caulk and foam, replacing leaky and fogged windows and upgrading to more efficient lighting in hallways, stairwells, and outside pathways.

The \$128,900 project was funded

through rebates from Source Gas, grants from the Denver-based StEPP Foundation, and generous contributions from Garfield County and the city of Glenwood Springs. "It's a lot of work, but it pays off," Duprey noted of the paperwork and renovations.

The director said the energy- and money-saving work could not have been accomplished without the cooperative and creative funding package managed by CLEER Energy Coach Rob Morey.

"It's one thing to know your needs, but it's another having the money to fix it," Duprey said. "Instead of putting Band-Aids on things, we were able to do it right."

Residents and administrators said the upgrades to LED lights and newer T-8 compact fluorescent bulbs with electronic ballasts have made a difference with visibility and security. Residents say they feel more comfortable going outside at night to walk their dogs, take out the trash, or sit at patio tables.

Maintenance Manager Crabb

said he knew the attic areas needed a major insulation fix, but he was surprised at how much difference the upgrades made in temperature control and consistency. He said two residents even asked that the heat to their units be turned off. "What a dramatic change from just the insulation," Crabb said. "There were a lot of comments from residents that they were a lot warmer and more comfortable."

Logan, who lives on the top floor, said he set his thermostat as high as possible during the winter of 2009–10 and still often ran two electric heaters. Last winter he and others turned the thermostat down and unplugged the space heaters.

"My apartment was comfortable this winter," Logan said. "And in the past, it was not."

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