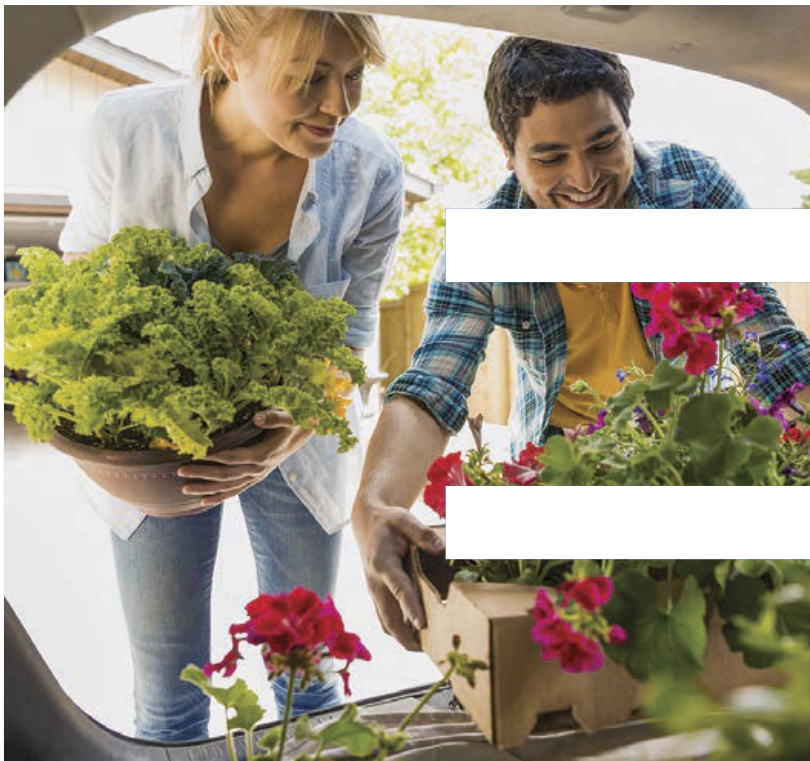




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SUPPLEMENT

SPRING 2025

Cool your bills, heat your home

by Gabrielle Gervais

It's a routine most Vermonters know all too well: the dance of getting ready for days in the thick of a frigid winter. Layering up in a long sleeved shirt, and then a sweater. Putting on thick wool socks and zipping up the warmest down jacket. Even when activities like skiing, making a snowman, or hitting the trails are involved, it can be frustrating to have to become a human marshmallow every morning.

But what about bundling up just to keep from shivering in the living room? It's all too common. "People are tired of paying to be cold," Sally Ayers, energy auditor and advisor with HEAT Squad, said. "It's not like you're not paying for heat. You're paying to bundle up inside your home." Sound familiar? Fuel bills are steadily on the rise and many Vermonters struggle to stay warm in their own residences. The good news is that truly comfortable winters (and summers, too) are

well within reach. *The Chronicle* caught up with members of long-standing Kingdom organizations that are ready to help every step of the way. Money is on the table right now for homeowners (and even renters and landlords) to make living spaces more comfortable, efficient, and affordable, regardless of income. Properly preparing homes for Vermont winters will not only make families more comfortable for generations to come, but it'll save money in the long run. **(Continued on page B2.)**

Consider weatherization

(Continued from page B1.)

Matthew Smith, public relations manager with Efficiency Vermont, says weatherization is something that often gets overlooked.

"If your furnace breaks, you may be thinking you need to replace it," he said. "But before you go and invest in one, it's a great thing to consider weatherization, because you're going to have a totally different need after you weatherize your home. You won't need to spend as much on a big furnace because you're not going to need as much heat. You can make better decisions about how your house is using energy once you get it weatherized."

According to Mr. Smith, Vermont and Maine have some of the oldest housing stock in the country, with one in four homes built before 1940. Given their age, that usually means there's a lot of work to do. Even houses built in the 1980s and beyond have a lot of weatherization needs, but

that means a big opportunity to save energy. It's not just about replacing appliances — it's adding quality, up-to-date insulation and sealing up the home. "It's going to be more efficient, however it uses energy," Mr. Smith said.

Weatherization may be an unfamiliar term to some. Or maybe its meaning has changed a bit since it was last considered. Wendy McGillivray, executive director for NETO, recently learned that back in the day, getting the house ready for winter looked much different.

"Jimmy Carter started it to save money back in the seventies, and people would sign up, bring in their own tools to be funded, and basically had to figure it out on their own," she explained. "Now, things are much more structured and scientific." So, what exactly does that entail?

An inside look at energy audits

For most folks, the weatherization journey begins with a visit from an energy auditor, like Ms. Ayers of HEAT Squad. She comes prepared with diagnostic tools, expertise, and answers to a homeowner's burning questions. About a week after her visit, a comprehensive energy report with estimated savings, available rebates, and project priority recommendations will arrive. HEAT Squad has been working to improve energy efficiency in homes across Vermont since 2007, and in the Kingdom since 2019, providing low-cost energy audits. After personally auditing over 500 homes throughout her career, Ms. Ayers knows a thing or two about weatherizing. Part of her job is to take a home's carbon footprint, fuel emissions, and health and safety into account while meeting the homeowners' needs.

"There's a lot of listening, a lot of communicating, and then coming up with a scope of work that makes the best sense for their home, their project, and their needs," she said. Ms. Ayers is trained and certified through the Building Performance Institute, a nonprofit that sets a high standard for credentialing people and



organizations in the residential energy auditing and upgrades sphere.

Ms. Ayers said she finds herself in a house built in the 1800s once or twice a week. She agrees heating a home in Vermont used to look different than it does now.

"When they were heating the older farmhouses, wood was plentiful," she said. "Families were big. Labor wasn't as big of an issue. You could have a fleet of kids and cousins and you could heat your home with wood with an outside furnace or boiler, and you didn't think twice about it, because the wood was on your land and you had plenty of family around to help chuck it."

Although that may still be the case for some lucky ducks, others are left with arduous manual labor and rising costs that can be difficult to keep up with.

"Even if you can provide wood on your own land, that's a lot of work," she said. Switching to cleaner heat can be a solution.

(Continued on page B3.)

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Assess appliances and home equipment

(Continued from page B2.)

Depending on the size of the home, Ms. Ayers said energy audits can take anywhere from two to four hours. During that time, she'll perform an extensive tour of the inside and outside of the house. She'll set up a tool called a blower door, which uses air flow to measure where cracks, gaps, and leaks appear. In the winter months, she uses her infrared camera to take a close look at air leakage. Outside, she looks at things like grading, and if water or moisture is finding its way into the house.

"I will talk to the customer the whole way," she said. "I look at energy bills, fuel usage, and electric bills and talk through their experience in the home." Whether homeowners have lived in their home for ten years or two months, there are things they can learn in the process.

Ms. Ayers explained that air typically moves through Vermont homes in a natural pattern, with cold air coming through an uninsulated or under-insulated basement foundation, and through convective air loops, moving up and out the attic. The primary focus of weatherization is to stopping the air from coming in at the basement level. While it may seem as if drafts and window cracks are the main culprit of energy loss, Ms. Ayers said comprehensive weatherization focuses on that later.

"I always say we put our boots on, we put our hat on, and we worry what's going on with the walls and the windows at another phase, because mostly what we want to stop first are those typical loops of convective air movement," she said.

As a healthy homes evaluator, Ms. Ayers also brings overall health and safety hazards to homeowners' attention throughout her tour. She inspects appliances and equipment, points out trip/fall risks, gas leaks, and checks carbon monoxide detectors, especially when elderly or health compromised people live in the home. Then, she packs up and gets to work submitting data for the report. In about a week's time, the homeowner gets a nice, clean, easy-to-read report that can also drill down to technical metrics (for



the engineers out there.) There are plenty of details on the home's energy model and recommendations for efficiency upgrades.

"If you were to move forward with the work, you get a priority list that can show you, 'I'm going to save more annually if I complete my attic

(Continued on page B4.)

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Weatherization is unique to each home

(Continued from page B3.)

over my basement. Maybe I can do the basement next year,” Ms. Ayers explained. In the report, HEAT Squad also presents two available loan options, including the Home Performance with Energy Star loan through Efficiency Vermont, that allows people to borrow at low rates to get weatherization work done.

“Homeowners can see their net savings versus their loan payment, what their ‘end of the day’ might look like, and their payback over a year, should they choose to do the work,” Ms. Ayers said.

Those reports make it easier for homeowners to understand exactly what’s going on within their walls.

All things considered, Ms. Ayers reported, a little more than half of the homes she audits fully commit to a weatherization project afterwards.

“We’re really lucky to live here in Vermont and have a program like this,” Ms. Ayers said. “You can be stuck in old-fashioned ways, but you need to be warm in the winter, especially when they last, and cool in the summer.”

Changing lives the Kingdom way

Weatherization looks different for every home, because each one has unique needs and goals. But affordability is at the top of most



people’s minds. Making a large down payment can turn anyone’s stomach into knots, but there’s an option unique to the NEK for qualified applicants that brings energy upgrades to their homes at absolutely no cost.

NETO, which got its start in 1979, is one of six weatherization agencies in the state, and the only one that isn’t part of a community action program.

“As we know, the Northeast Kingdom is very unique, so it makes sense that we’re going to be just a little different and do things our own way,” Ms. McGillivray said. While she’s only been with NETO for just over a year, she’s passionately taken on her role as executive director. She’s new to the weatherization business, but not to managing and supporting a stellar team.

Martha Stevens, assistant director of NETO, has been with the company for just about 34 and a half years.

“When I first started here, there was a stigma attached to this program,” she said. “You had to be low income, and now the income guidelines are so high that a lot of our working people — a lot of people in the NEK — are eligible now. What we do is quality work.”

Similarly to HEAT Squad, NETO works with permanent weatherization, which involves a complete energy audit from top to bottom.

“We go from the basement to the attic, do diagnostic testing, check for energy leaks, have furnaces cleaned and tuned,” Ms. Stevens said.

“Whatever the auditor finds, they

(Continued on page B5.)



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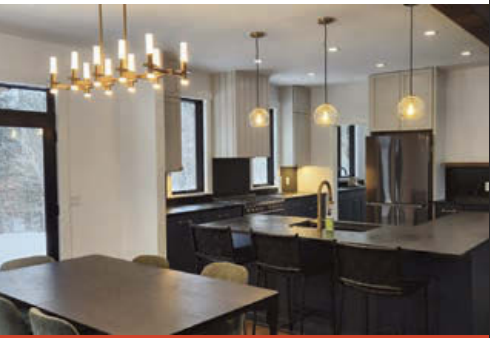
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Identifying telltale red flags

(Continued from page B4.)

write up. Then our crews will go and install the work.”

The NETO team consists of 11 crew members and crew chiefs in Newport, with about eight or nine team members in St. Johnsbury. They’re the people who go and do the project work. Ahead of that, they have four auditors who do the energy auditing, and two energy coaches. There is also Shannon Collins at the Newport office and Shirley Hahr in St. Johnsbury, to answer any intake questions.

“They do all of the real work, and they’re exceptional,” Ms. McGillivray said. “We’re very, very lucky to have every one of them.”

Whether one owns or rents an apartment, house, or mobile home, NETO’s weatherization program is available as long as your household meets the income eligibility. According to Efficiency Vermont, about 60 percent of Vermont households qualify as low or moderate income. As of July 2024, for one person in the household, eligible annual income must be below \$57,000. For four, it must be below \$81,850. A full list of income eligibility guidelines can be found at: vtneto.org/income-guidelines. Regardless of annual income, a household may also qualify for the program if anyone in it receives Reach Up, Supplemental Security Income, or Seasonal Fuel Assistance.

“It’s not just low income

households, it’s fixed income, too,” Ms. McGillivray said. “We take into consideration the last 12 months’ worth of income for people. That could be Social Security, that could be retirement. You don’t have to be destitute to not have the extra money and funds needed to do what will help improve your lifestyle and your home through weatherization.”

The best way a person can find out if they qualify is to give Ms. Collins a call at (802) 334-7378. She walks callers through the application process and answers any initial questions.

When deciding whether or not to weatherize your home, a significant red flag is the presence of small drafts.

“People may not think much of them, and there’s a lot to consider,” Ms. Stevens said. “But, you get a couple of small little cracks, and it can be like opening up a window in your house.”

Also, ice dams building up along the eaves during winter are a telltale sign of heat loss from the attic.

“If you’ve noticed ice building up, you should really be calling to get weatherized,” Ms. Stevens said.

While NETO helps the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it reports to Vermont’s Department for Children and Families, and that’s where its passion lies.

“At the heart of it, we’re a

human services organization,” Ms. McGillivray said. “It’s what we do. We help people stay in their homes longer and be more comfortable in their homes.”

NETO is funded by, and works closely with, the Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity, which has the mission of increasing the self-sufficiency of Vermonters, strengthening communities, and eliminating the causes and symptoms of poverty.

“Weatherization could make the difference between someone having

to decide between paying for heat and eating or paying for their medication,” Ms. McGillivray said.

Both Ms. Stevens and Ms. McGillivray couldn’t say enough nice things about their team. And based on feedback received, it seems their customers feel the same way. Ms. McGillivray mentioned a handwritten note from a customer (one among many) that said the NETO crews were so kind, completely non-judgmental about the situation in the home, and they

(Continued on page B6.)

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Consider cost and comfort

(Continued from page B5.)

were so grateful for all of the time that they spent there with them explaining the process.

“Some homes are more challenging than others, but our boys are very professional,” Ms. Stevens added. “They know what they’re doing, and they’re very proud of what they do.”

NETO crews check the home before weatherization, but also after to see the results of the work. If there’s anything left to be done, they deal with it before they sign off.

“It’s a whole home solution, start to finish. And we really do have just the best crews,” Ms. McGillivray said.

DIY deals and weatherization pro-tips

Did you know that heating buildings is the second biggest cause of greenhouse gas emissions in Vermont, right behind transportation? Efficiency Vermont, which works hand-in-hand with

organizations like HEAT Squad and NETO, is helping the state transition to a more affordable and cleaner future. Weatherizing a home helps reduce how much energy is used, which results in fewer emissions. So, getting a home project done has the side effect of helping Vermont reach its climate goals. Most people, though, think about cost and comfort before long-term concerns like climate.

Efficiency Vermont has that covered, too. Mr. Smith, the organization’s public relations manager, spoke with *the Chronicle* about the rebates and offerings they have right now.

For starters, Efficiency Vermont’s virtual home energy audit is a way to get a crash course on weatherization with an energy expert from your smartphone, computer, or tablet. It’s a 90-minute, one-on-one video call. For the camera shy, the meeting can take place as a phone call.

Like the in-person audits mentioned earlier, an energy expert



will “walk” through a home with its owner and explain what they see from an expert perspective. Mr. Smith said they’ll point out anything from outdated appliances to inefficient heaters, and they come ready with rebate recommendations to help save on electricity bills.

“Really, they’re trained to look for things that weatherization can address,” Mr. Smith said. “They’ll tell you exactly what they’re seeing in your home, what opportunities there are for you to consider for projects, for appliances, rebates, and more. They’ll also give you next steps.”

One of the best parts is that it’s completely free and low-commitment, so homeowners can take their time making a final decision. Mr. Smith himself experienced this when he moved into his historic home with his wife and got an energy audit in person.

“We didn’t have any money to even think about something like that, so we sat on it for a while before we could actually invest some money in our weatherization project,” he said.

Follow-up questions are (Continued on page B7.)

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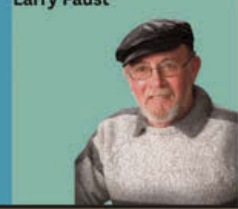
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What a small change can mean for your home

(Continued from page B6.)

expected and encouraged. The energy expert assigned to a person's home will stay in touch via email, and there's a phone line available with experts on hand to help clear up any questions.

Mr. Smith also highlighted two different rebates that Efficiency Vermont currently offers. The smaller of the two is a do-it-yourself (DIY) weatherization rebate. As its name suggest a homeowner can complete a qualifying project, fill out the rebate form, and get \$100 back.

"Hopefully it's a way to see what a small change can mean for your home," he said. "It's a pretty straightforward, low-risk, high-reward offer for folks."

For example, using wrap materials to insulate pipes that carry hot water to a bathroom is an eligible expense. Air sealing or weather stripping doors to provide a tight seal is also a common project eligible for this rebate. An added benefit is Efficiency Vermont's partnership with the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPSSA), the organization that supports municipal electric utilities in the state. Any customer of Barton Village Electric, Hardwick Electric,

Lyndon Electric, or the village of Orleans Electric is eligible for bonus rebates, no strings attached. For instance, the \$100 DIY rebate would become a \$200 rebate for a customer of those utilities. People can learn more about those bonuses at efficiencyvermont.com/vppsa.

Currently, Efficiency Vermont's biggest available rebate offers comprehensive weatherization through Home Performance with Energy Star. Those seeking such a rebate must use a contractor in Efficiency Vermont's Efficiency Excellence Network, like HEAT Squad and NETO, to complete the project. The rebate offers up to \$9,500 cash back for income-eligible households on a project that improves a home's insulation and air sealing. Moderate income households get 75 percent of project cost back. Those rebates are also limited to \$9,500. Those with incomes above the lower-moderate income category get 75 percent of a project's cost back, but with a ceiling of \$4,000.

Even after a virtual energy visit and consultation, the idea of paying for weatherization can feel intimidating. Efficiency Vermont also offers a couple of financing

options to ease the mind. One is a loan, and one adds the cost of weatherization to your utility bill. The home energy loan is low, and sometimes zero, interest loan for a home energy project. It's mainly for weatherization, but needed appliance upgrades, can be rolled

into the loan as well. More information can be found at efficiencyvermont.com/services/financing/homes/home-energy-loan.

The other option is Efficiency Vermont's repayment assistance program (WRAP), which works with (Continued on page B8.)



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Seeing the savings

(Continued from page B7.)

utilities to put the cost of a project as an extra charge on the monthly utility bill.

"There's no credit check involved, and you don't have to send in the rebate, so it's a little easier for folks who don't necessarily have that money up front," Mr. Smith said. The payments are designed so once a home is weatherized, the money saved essentially replaces the monthly payment for the project.

"Once that project is done being paid off, you're going to see those savings right away," Mr. Smith said.

Living in a historic home, Mr.

Smith said, has allowed him to experience his fair share of the "charming" qualities that come with them. From this perspective, he understands how it can feel too daunting to take on such a big project without some support.

"Realistically, Efficiency Vermont has rebates for weatherization for any income, whether you're high income, moderate, or low income," he said. "As people are learning a bit more about how energy works and thinking about how the state is generating its electricity, people are more open to the idea of weatherization, knowing it's going to



help them save on their heating bill and electricity bill."

Apply, apply, apply

With the savings and benefits offered by local organizations in mind, weatherization can feel more like a possibility.

To recap, HEAT Squad offers low-cost energy audits with experts like Ms. Ayers to help people understand exactly what's going on in the home, and how to help. Apply online at heatsquad.org/schedule

energy-audit/ or call (802) 438-2303.

NETO offers comprehensive weatherization from start to finish at no cost to the homeowner for income eligible households. Apply online at vtneto.org/apply or call (800) 639-3212.

From a \$9,500 rebate on a weatherization project to folding project costs into the monthly utility bill, Efficiency Vermont helps make energy efficiency affordable.

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Five cleaning tips and five rebates to spring into energy savings

Spring cleaning and saving energy go together like seeds in the garden. That's why Efficiency Vermont is sharing five tips — and five rebates — that can help Vermonters save money and use less energy during their spring clean-up. Keeping energy in mind while preparing for warmer weather can also kickstart planning for home improvements in the months ahead, like Efficiency Vermont's increased heat pump rebates as of April 1.

April is "Earth Month," and just around the corner is the Vermont tradition of Green Up Day, on Saturday, May 3. Efficiency Vermont is among the many Green Up Day sponsors who supported more than 30,100 volunteers last year who together collected over 400 tons of trash and disposed of some 15,800 tires.

In the spirit of Earth Month and Green Up Day, and with spring cleaning on everyone's agenda, Efficiency Vermont has five tips to help Vermonters tidy up — and five rebates to save this spring — which can improve a home's comfort and reduce energy bills.

Here are 5 spring cleaning tips for a more energy efficient home:

Work efficiency into a spring-cleaning routine. Clean appliances and systems in the home to optimize their performance. Dust bathroom fan covers and behind the fridge. Remove grease and dust from the kitchen's stove hood or exhaust fans. Clear lint and debris from the clothes dryer's exhaust and filter. And sweep or vacuum near any vents, ducts, or registers. Keeping these systems clean means they'll use less energy and save money on power bills.

Replace or clean filters in the equipment that keeps residents warm. Check filters on the heat pump, furnace, or boiler. Replace or clean any filters on the heat pump or connected ductwork. Consider replacing these filters every few months (for some circumstances, like homes with pets, more frequently may be best). Portable air purifiers and window AC units also have filters to clean or replace.

Schedule annual maintenance for the home's heating system. Book a professional to clean and service the indoor and outdoor components of a home's heating, ventilation, or air conditioning

(HVAC) system. This ensures they're working and ready for next winter (or the next chilly day).

Manage the home's moisture. Moisture and water in a basement can be a serious hazard to the health of the home and the people living inside. Take steps to fix a wet, damp, or leaky basement. Follow CDC guidelines to clean any mold that's found. Using an ENERGY STAR-certified dehumidifier to remove moisture is great, but addressing the underlying issues can save energy and money in the long run.

Plan ahead for projects — and savings. Spring is the perfect time to think ahead and plan home energy projects. Start with a free Virtual Home Energy Visit to get expert advice on the home's biggest areas for improvement — and learn about our rebates to save big on those projects.

Now is a great time to review Efficiency Vermont's rebates for weatherization, heating/cooling systems, and energy-saving appliances. Here are five spring cleaning rebates to consider to meet personal home energy goals:

Cool off with DIY Weatherization and get a cool \$100. Sealing around windows and doors isn't just for winter weather. Air sealing can help keep the home comfortable all year long — using less energy to stay cool in warmer months. Now homeowners can get \$100 back for completing a qualifying DIY home weatherization project, including weather-stripping, insulation, and air sealing.

Stay cool — or warm up — with boosted heat pump rebates. Starting in April 2025, Efficiency Vermont is offering increased heat pump rebates. That means bigger savings on these efficient heating and air conditioning systems. Plus, additional rebates may be offered by the utility service. Learn how heat pumps can cool (and

heat) a home, then explore Efficiency Vermont's heat pump rebates.

Complete comprehensive weatherization while the sun is shining. Weatherizing a whole home can take time, so starting those projects in warmer weather makes sense. But comprehensive weatherization makes sense in other ways, too: it can reduce household energy bills year-round, and address health and safety concerns in a home. Get up to \$9,500 cash back for comprehensive weatherization and explore ways to pay for a project over time.

Tidy up the monthly bill with more efficient appliances. Find energy-saving options for dehumidifiers, window AC units, heat pump clothes dryers, and more. Pair these appliances with a smart thermostat to keep the home at the perfect temperature no matter the season.

Electrify the home lawn care. Using a gas-powered lawnmower for one hour emits as much pollution as driving a car 45 miles, according to the EPA. Battery-powered or plug-in lawnmowers, leaf blowers, and trimmers avoid those noxious emissions — and electric lawn care tools are a lot quieter, too.

Household income could qualify homeowners for bonus rebates and additional partner offers. Income-eligible homes can get free services and products through Efficiency Vermont, including a voucher to replace an inefficient appliance that may be impacting your electric bill. Low-income households can also qualify for free weatherization from Vermont's Weatherization Assistance Programs. Check eligibility by contacting Efficiency Vermont's Energy Advisors — call (888) 921-5990. Updated annually, income guidelines vary by county, household size, and annual income. Visit efficiencyvermont.com for details on income-based programs. — from Efficiency Vermont.



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Housing projects awarded in Craftsbury and Newport

More than 900 attendees gathered at the Better Building by Design (BBD) conference last week. Efficiency Vermont's annual event brings together design professionals, leaders in building construction, and experts in climate workforce trades. Thirteen "Best of the Best" awards were given out to builders, architects, designers, and HVAC and plumbing installers for their commitment to energy excellence, including two projects in Craftsbury and Newport.

Hosted at the DoubleTree Hotel and Conference Center in South Burlington from April 2-3, the event was devoted to the theme of "2030 on the Horizon: Assessing Vermont's Vision Versus Reality." Attendees gathered to discuss the latest in efficiency practices and

technologies, build new relationships and professional connections, and share insights and experiences through nearly 50 sessions and workshops.

This year's "Best of the Best" awards include two local projects in the "residential new construction" category. Kinsey Construction LLC and David Koschak Design LLC built a single-family market rate project on South Craftsbury Road in Craftsbury. Efficiency Vermont says, "This modern energy efficient home achieves high efficiency thanks to double-stud construction, triple-glazed casement windows, and heating and cooling via heat pumps. A super-insulated poured concrete basement with additional insulation measures applied to below- and (Continued on page B11.)



This award-winning project by Kinsey Construction LLC and David Koschak Design, LLC in Craftsbury features double-stud construction, triple-glazed casement windows, and heating and cooling via heat pumps. Efficiency Vermont says the home is a model for designers seeking to provide comfort, air quality and durability while meeting the housing needs of Vermonters with average budgets.



David Koschak and Dylan Kinsey accept "Best of the Best" award for energy excellence alongside Efficiency Vermont program manager Tim Yandow for their modern, energy efficient home project in Craftsbury, at the 2025 Better Building by Design conference. Photos courtesy of Efficiency Vermont



Tim Yandow, program manager, Efficiency Vermont, stands with Bob Hansen, Robert Barnum, Chantelle Blackburn, Lance Miller, and Becky Masure, accepting a "Best of the Best" award for their project in Newport.

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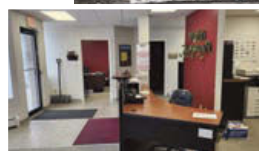
"Your service has always been great and prompt. Jobs always look great when finished," says Andrew Touchette of Blue Flame Gas.

"Desrochers Crane Service and Excavating goes to great lengths to make sure my jobs run efficiently. They are very helpful in getting set up ready to rock and roll! I will always recommend them and am looking forward to our business relationship to grow in the future," says Joe Hinton of JRH Building Construction.

"Great service, great work, great people," says Dave Laforce of Built by Newport.

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Jeff Harper
Realtor



Comfort, quality and durability in a home

(Continued from page B10.)

above-grade walls and in the ceiling and attic spaces. Multiple measures in the interior walls, air and weather-resistive barriers, and exterior sheathing help manage moisture and promote longevity. The home is a model for designers seeking to provide comfort, air quality and durability while meeting the housing needs of Vermonters with average budgets.”

Additionally, RuralEdge was awarded for its work on a single-family affordable housing project on Shattuck Hill in Newport. Efficiency Vermont says, “RuralEdge used funds provided by Vermont’s Manufactured Home Replacement and Infill Initiative through the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to purchase and install two homes at the Shattuck Hill Mobile Home Park. Each two-bedroom Zero Energy Ready Home

(ZERH) meets Efficiency Vermont’s Advanced Manufactured Homes’ efficiency standards, including efficient all-electric heating systems that keep operating costs down. The homes will be rented to people over the age of 55 who are moving from homelessness, as selected through the Coordinated Entry program administered by Northeast Kingdom Community Action. Fecteau Homes procured the housing units, with partners including MEI (electrical work), Harris Plumbing and Heating, and Vermont Electric Cooperative.”

Learn more about the conference and see a full list of winners at:
www.efficiencyvermont.com/trade-partners/bbd.
— from Efficiency Vermont.



RuralEdge and many partners used funds provided by the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board to purchase two homes at the Shattuck Hill Mobile Home Park in Newport to make them more comfortable and affordable for decades to come.

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Increasing vegetable plant diversity with seeds

by Amy Simone, UVM Extension

Choosing seeds and starting your own transplants are among the most empowering ways to garden. Why grow the same vegetable varieties that you can buy at the grocery store when there are so many others to try?

In addition, purchasing unique varieties of seeds encourages growers to keep offering them. As a bonus, diversity in your vegetable garden can give our pollinators and other beneficial insects a wider diet.

Perhaps you are looking for the ideal tomato to slice fresh off the vine into your salads and prefer them to be balanced between acidity and sweetness. As you read the growers' notes on various tomato varieties, focus on the description of their flavors and uses and let that guide you to a few options.

Among the choices between those perfect, not-too-sweet, fresh eating tomatoes, there also are options for hybrid, heirloom or open-pollinated seeds.

Hybrid seeds, also referred to as F1 (first generation off-spring) hybrids, are the result of a controlled cross between two parent plants of the same species carefully chosen for their attributes. This is a lengthy process that may take seven to eight years until a consistent hybrid plant is achieved.

The seeds from this winning combination are packaged and sold with a higher price tag. In

exchange for the extra cost are seeds with "hybrid vigor." These seeds germinate into strong seedlings that become larger plants, yield more fruit and are more resistant to the common diseases and pests for that type of plant.

To clarify, hybrids are not genetically modified organisms, also called GMOs, as some people may believe. GMOs are made by modifying the plant's genetic material in a lab.

The downside to hybrids is that to continue to grow the variety that you like, you will need to buy seeds for it each year. Seeds saved and planted from F1 hybrids will not result in the same plant.

Open-pollinated seeds, often noted as "OP" on packets, are from plants that are pollinated naturally by the wind and insects. Seeds saved from these plants will grow exactly the same variety. It's especially easy to save the seeds of beans, lettuce, tomatoes and peas for planting in future seasons since these are self-pollinating plants.

Heirloom seeds are open-pollinated plants that were developed naturally outside of the commercial plant trade. Heirloom plants often have been saved and replanted for more than 50 years, and there is usually an interesting backstory to how that variety developed. Standard and heirloom open-pollinated seeds will yield stable traits from generation to generation. Many people feel that their flavor is superior to that of hybrids. They are less expensive than



hybrids, especially when you save their seeds for the following year's crop.

If saving seeds is important to you, there is likely an open-pollinated variety with the desired attributes that is similar enough to a hybrid that you like.

Hybrid varieties may be better if you have a smaller garden and want to get more yield from fewer plants. Open-pollinated plants will offer more varieties that focus on taste and uniqueness. There is room in your garden for both.

Most importantly, embrace the power to expand the diversity of vegetables that you grow by selecting your own seeds. For questions about seeds, seed starting and other gardening topics, feel free to reach out the Extension Master Gardener Helpline at <https://go.uvm.edu/gardenquestion>.

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How to boost home value before selling

People considering buying or selling a home are facing a unique market. The real estate market has been in flux for several years, and high interest rates have made it more expensive to borrow.

The Mortgage Bankers Association is projecting that 30-year mortgage rates will level out to 6.5 percent for the foreseeable future. That means that people who have been waiting for changes in the real estate market could be disappointed, and hesitant buyers may finally just bite the bullet and buy even if mortgage rates are not where they hoped they'd be in 2025. Homeowners with properties they are considering listing for sale would be wise to make certain changes that will help garner the best prices from buyers.

Make kitchen and bath improvements

The kitchen is the heart of many homes. Real estate agents may recommend that homeowners make minor to moderate kitchen upgrades like resurfacing cabinets, upgrading countertops, and changing fixtures or hardware to give the room an overhaul. Homeowners also should look to bathroom updates as smart investments that can improve home value. Katie Severance, author of *The Brilliant Home Buyer*, characterizes kitchens and baths as "money rooms" that add the most value to a home.

Declutter the home

Homeowners should clean out items they no longer need. Decluttering can make a space feel

bigger, which is beneficial in a market where open concept floor plans remain popular among home buyers. When buyers walk through a prospective home, they want to envision themselves living there, something that is more easily done if the home isn't overrun with the current homeowner's belongings.

Get to painting

Painting a home is a cost-effective renovation with a lot of oomph. Freshly painted rooms appear clean and updated, says HGTV, and that can appeal to buyers. Homeowners should choose neutral colors to accommodate the widest array of potential buyers.

Improve the landscaping

The exterior of a home is the first thing potential buyers will see as they roll up to view a property or look at a listing online. Homeowners should start by evaluating and enhancing the landscaping. Ensure the lawn is well-maintained and add plants that provide color without a lot of maintenance.

Expand usable space

Homeowners can think about adding to the usable space in a home. This translates into finishing basements or attics or even converting garages to rooms. Or it may involve adding a three-season room. Homeowners can consider several improvements to increase the resale value of their properties.



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Four signs of potential electrical hazards in a home

Homeowners know that the work of maintaining a home is never done. Cleaning is a daily task associated with homeownership, and such sessions can reveal more than dust buildup or dirty walls and surfaces.

When cleaning a home, homeowners can pull double duty and look for potentially hazardous situations. For example, vacuuming and dusting sessions can present a great opportunity to spot electrical hazards that might otherwise go unseen. With that in mind, homeowners can keep an eye out for these four signs of potential electrical hazards when working around the house.

First, look for tingling when touching an electrical appliance. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) advises homeowners to call a qualified electrician immediately if they experience a tingling feeling when touching an electrical appliance. The Electrical Safety Office notes experiencing a tingle or the feeling of being shocked is not normal. Homeowners who experience such a feeling should avoid the location and warn others in the home to do the same.

Next, check for wall outlets that look or feel unusual. Wall outlets do not garner much attention, as many are low enough to be out of sight or even behind furniture. So, a cleaning session might be the only time homeowners will notice issues with wall outlets. The NFPA notes discolored outlets or outlets that feel warm to the touch is a sign of an electrical problem. Various issues can cause outlets to look or feel unusual. An outlet could be short-circuiting, or wires could be damaged, and each issue merits the attention of a qualified electrician.



Be wary of foul odors. An odor that calls to mind burning rubber is another indicator of an electrical problem. Various electrical experts indicate such odors can be indicative of damaged wiring, an overloaded circuit, or loose connections, each of which poses a significant safety hazard. The NFPA urges homeowners to contact a qualified electrician immediately if they sense a smell of burning rubber in their homes.

Finally, make sure to note flickering lights. Homeowners won't need to wait until cleaning sessions to notice flickering lights. Such flickering

is hard to miss regardless of what residents are doing inside a home. Sometimes lights flicker because of a loose bulb, so homeowners who notice flickering should first turn off the light, let the bulb cool down if need be and then check to make sure it isn't loose. If the bulb isn't loose, then lights could be flickering for a multitude of reasons. A loose connection can cause flickering, as can an overloaded circuit. Homeowners also may not realize that not all bulbs and dimmer switches are designed to work together. For example, modern LED light bulbs often require the installation of specific dimmer switches, or the lights won't operate properly. Flickering can result if these products are not compatible. If a home is old, then flickering lights could be due to old wiring that needs to be replaced.

Daily and weekly cleaning sessions can be a good time for homeowners to perform a quick audit of electrical outlets and lights to ensure everything is safe and working properly.



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How to find the right contractor for your next home renovation

Home renovations are significant undertakings. Though some projects require more sizable investments of time and money than others, all merit homeowners' attention and inspire some excitement when pondering the finished product.

A finished product tends to offer more appeal when the project is overseen and undertaken by a professional contractor. Small projects may be in the wheelhouse of skilled do-it-yourselfers, but most homeowners are best served leaving home renovations to the professionals. Finding the right contractor for a given job is of the utmost importance, and the following are some tips to help homeowners do just that.

Seek word-of-mouth recommendations. Word-of-mouth advertising has long been recognized as an invaluable tool to attract customers, and for good reason. A 2025 report on the state of the roofing industry provided by Roofing Contractor, the official publication for the International Roofing Expo®, found that 79 percent of homeowners identify word-of-mouth as the top way to find a roofing professional. Word-of-mouth is so valued because homeowners can ask friends or neighbors about their experiences with a given professional in a pressure-free setting. Word-of-mouth also can help homeowners cut down on the pool of potential contractor candidates, which is no small benefit in markets flooded with renovation professionals.

Secure multiple written estimates. It can be



time-consuming to speak to multiple contractors and secure written estimates from each one, but such legwork is well worth the effort if the result is finding the right contractor. Secure multiple estimates even if the first one provided to you is below budget. Multiple estimates allow homeowners to compare what's included, and not included, in each one. Some contractors offering low estimates may not include materials costs or additional factors that will increase the price. Others may seem more expensive initially but may prove more affordable than competitors if their estimates include all the costs associated with the project. Only a direct comparison of multiple estimates, which should include details specific to the project and an itemized list of what will be provided and performed

by the contractor, can give homeowners an idea of what they're paying for.

Stay local when possible. Hiring local contractors is beneficial for a number of reasons. Hiring locals keeps money in the community and thus supports the local economy. And working with local contractors can make it easier for homeowners to keep lines of communication open. Many projects also require a little post-completion upkeep or even some tweaks, which is more easily accomplished when working with contractors based nearby. And finally, local contractors will be familiar with building codes and other details specific to a given town. That familiarity can ensure a project is done in adherence to codes and not stalled by permit- or inspection-related delays.

Confirm their insurance. Travelers Insurance urges homeowners to confirm a contractor is properly insured and bonded prior to signing a contract. Contractors should be willing to provide a certificate of insurance (COI) that indicates their provider, policy number and coverage limits. Travelers also notes homeowners can contact insurers directly to verify coverage and ensure the policy is current. Never hire a contractor who is uninsured or unwilling to provide proof of insurance.

Hiring a contractor to perform a home renovation may be a leap of faith, but homeowners can take steps to ensure they find the right professional for the job.

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Property transfers

Town of Jay — March 2024 thru July 2024

Recorded	S = Seller B = Buyer	Address	Description	Acres	Price Sold Grand List	Recorded	S = Seller B = Buyer	Address	Description	Acres	Price Sold Grand List
3/11/24	Sharplin Daniel (S) Sharplin Caroline (S) Heney Daniel (B)	Parcel ID 19-0490003 Green Mountain	OL	0.91	\$59,000 \$32,500	5/9/24	Desrochers Roland (S) Desrochers Roland (B) Hamelin Tiffany (B)	256 Loop Rd Th30	PR	8.47	\$52,100 \$104,200
3/14/24	Michael Goldberg, Receive (S) Sullivan Michael (B)	Vermont Route 105	OL	10.4	\$72,000 \$43,800	5/15/24	Jay Properties LLC (S) Piet Residential Real Est (B)	319 Jay Peak Road Unit 4709	1 Unit	0	\$269,900 *\$3,197,600
3/14/24	Woodard David (S) Woodard Caroline (S) Farrar Isabelle Savignac (B) Farrar Jonathan (B)	232 North Village Road, THVc301	1 Unit	0	\$400,000 \$272,100	5/20/24	Bartlett Daniel (S) Bartlett Susan (S) Matthews Patrick (B)	113 Cote Cove	PR	1.02	\$585,000 \$424,800
3/14/24	Michael Goldberg, Receive (S) Sullivan Michael (B)	Vermont Route 105	OL	10.4	\$72,000 \$43,800	5/29/24	Palm Jon (S) Palm Mary (S) Smith David (B) Smith Kerra (B)	181 Bridge Road TH515 VC 358	1 Unit	0	\$430,000 \$278,800
3/21/24	Vize Dan (S) Perry Ralph (B) Perry Alice (B)	155 Stevens Mill Road	MH	0	\$20,000 \$137,700	6/17/24	Jay Properties LLC (S) Rogers Matthew (B) Arkinson Heather (B)	319 Jay Peak Road	1 Unit	0	\$599,000 *\$1,275,400
3/27/24	Jay Properties LLC (S) Kaeser Pascal (B) Kaeser-Woo Yea (B)	Unit 4761, 356 Bridge Road	1 Unit	0	\$269,900 *\$3,197,600	6/27/24	Jay Properties LLC (S) Watroba Christopher (B)	356 Bridge Road, Unit 4758	1 Unit	0	\$429,000 *\$1,275,400
3/27/24	Thomas Matthew (S) Thomas Heather (S) Vecchione Derek (B)	373 Wilderness Road	PR	2	\$640,000 \$271,200	7/8/24	Jay Properties LLC (S) Burrington Shawn (B) Seid Kristina (B)	356 Bridge Road, Unit 4756	1 Unit	0	\$599,000 *\$1,275,400
3/28/24	Vecchione Shawn (S) Mays Colleen (B)	Lot 4 - Woodland Drive	OL	10.1	\$20,000 \$104,200	7/15/24	Lamoille Land Company Inc (S) Donohue Christopher (B) Donohue Ryan (B) Donohue Justin (B) Barrett Angela (B)	132 Jay Woods Drive	OL	3.24	\$110,000 \$52,500
4/11/24	Local Boys Development Co (S) Gottfried and Paula Halbe (B)	Lot 48r, Foothills Drive	Other	1.03	\$60,000 *\$488,200	7/18/24	Lamoille Land Company Inc (S) Heyel Kevin (B)	135 Jay Woods Drive	OL	3.39	\$110,000 \$52,500
4/15/24	Perry Ralph (S) Perry Alice (S) Martin Robert (B) Roy Tricia (B)	155 Stevens Mill Road	MH	50.4	\$245,000 \$137,700	7/23/24	Duvall Kathryn (S) Duvall Samuel (S) Gorra Alexandra (B) Gorra William (B)	482 Shallow Brook Road	Res	1	\$489,900 \$243,600
5/6/24	James D Sullivan and Amy (S) Nadeau, Jr William (B) Nadeau Janelle (B)	27 Queens Road TH517 VC 422	1 Unit	0	\$725,000 \$428,000	7/23/24	Pappalardo Michael (S) Pappalardo Tanya (S) Barter andrew (B)	Off Morse Road	OL	5.51	\$25,00 *\$111,000
5/6/24	Waltz Christopher (S) Waltz Kirsten (S) Archambault Michael (B) Clarke Megan (B)	125 South Village Road THVC 384	1 Unit	0	\$620,000 \$349,500	7/23/24	Pappalardo Michael (S) Pappalardo Tanya (S) Barter andrew (B)	Off Morse Road	OL	6.09	\$25,000 *\$111,000
5/6/24	Wilderness Holdings LLC (S) Thomas Matthew (B)	Wilderness Road Parcel	OL	1.4	\$60,000 \$28,000	7/23/24	Jay Properties LLC (S) Chumsae Stephen (B) Chumsae Michelle (B)	296 Bridge Road, Unit 4762	1 Unit	0	\$269,900 *\$1,275,400
5/6/24	Farrar Jonathan (S) Savignac Farrar Isabelle (S) Miller Gregory (B) Miller Talia (B)	228 Slopeside Road, Th505 #S708	1 Unit	0	\$390,000 \$217,600						

*Assessed Value Includes Adjoining Land

KEY: Com = Commercial MF = Multi-Family MH = Mobile Home OF - Operating Farm OL = Open Land
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