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THE BUZZ ON BUSINESS

Venture aims to ease heating and cooling

By David Maggiotto

Summer has not officially begun, but already record-pushing heat has descended on the Rivertowns and beyond. Those who wasted little time dusting off their air conditioners may have already observed a spike in their most recent utility bill, as air-conditioning units are high consumers of electricity.

There is still time to acclimatize your living space and maintain some control over looming energy costs. NeighborGreen: Home Weatherizing Made Easy, is a new company that works with homeowners to minimize energy consumption, particularly as it relates to cooling — and heating — their homes.

“The goal is to make weatherizing one’s home easier and more affordable so that we consume less energy,” said Hastings resident Jean Hamerman, who founded NeighborGreen this spring. “If it’s done well, [weatherizing] lowers your bills, provides year-round comfort, and is good for the environment.”

The first step in this process is pinpointing the sources of a home’s air leakage. Common culprits include windows, back doors, and electrical sockets. NeighborGreen employs energy advisers to survey homes and locate exactly where these leaks occur. Energy advisers also examine other sources of wasted energy in the home, such as inefficient appliances and lighting, and the homeowner ultimately determines the type of work

he or she wants done.

Hamerman, 52, began her career in commercial banking. In the past she has served as deputy commissioner for New York City Small Business Services, a director of lending for ACCION New York, and an energy-efficiency lighting surveyor for Con Edison’s Small Business Direct Install Program. She moved to Hastings in 2009 with her domestic partner and their two children, Ellie and Cal, now age 6 and 8, respectively.

Moving into their new — but old and drafty — house helped kick-start NeighborGreen. “After searching for a company to make my home more comfortable,” Hamerman wrote on her company’s Web site, “I quickly learned entry-level home weatherizing services were unavailable.”

About a year ago she began putting a business plan together and became certified with the Building Performance Institute (BPI), a standards development and credentialing for residential energy efficiency and retrofit work.

Introductory “Seal & Save” packages run \$550 to \$1,450, depending on the size of the home and other factors, such as the presence of carpeting, which provides insulation and makes weatherizing easier. Some Seal & Save measures include caulking the space between walls and baseboards; installing door sweeps around the perimeter of drafty doors; and sealing around windows and air-conditioning units. “The package gener-

ally pays for itself in 12 months,” Hamerman said.

To track these savings, NeighborGreen customers are enrolled in Wego-Wise, an online service that tracks gas and electricity consumption in homes. According to NeighborGreen’s Web site, homeowners purchasing the introductory package save an average of 10 percent to 15 percent on their home’s annual heating and electric bills. More comprehensive packages, which can include filling exterior walls with dense-pack cellulose and the installation of new, energy-efficient HVAC systems, offer even greater savings over time, but also carry higher start-up costs for the homeowner.

“There is no energy work we will not undertake, and you will really only have to deal with our company,” Hamerman said. She explained that NeighborGreen acts as the liaison between clients and contractors that are brought in to implement the more complicated work.

This spring, Hamerman, who is a member of the Hastings Conservation Commission, enlisted two Hastings High School seniors, Mike Tong and Brendan Quinn, as interns for NeighborGreen.

“Our job was to spread the word at farmers’ markets and other green events,” Tong said. He said the internship “helped with [his] marketing abilities,” as his role was drumming up interest for the company. So far local interest has been strong, as Hamerman has already facilitated

many home surveys, which are free of charge, and enrolled a number of homeowners as clients.

“I have high expectations and hopes for the company,” she said. “For me, it’s all about community and neighbors helping each other and doing the right thing.” To that end, Hamerman hopes to enlist local residents to host house parties that can serve as platforms for sustainability experts and NeighborGreen’s overall message.

“My vision is to make conservation the new norm, and to do that people need to make the habit of trading tips on how to conserve energy like they might trade food recipes,” Hamerman said.

Anyone interested in hosting an event, or in having their home surveyed by an energy adviser, can contact Hamerman and the entire NeighborGreen team at (914) 368-9150. More information can be found online at neighborgreen.com.

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