



VIVA VERDE INTERN A.J. SANDOVAL CHECKS TOILET FOR WATER LEAKS. (RICHARD MAHLER PHOTO)

“ENERGY SENSE” UPGRADES CONTINUING IN SILVER CITY AND GRANT COUNTY

Nearly 100 of the 450 homes slated for free conservation upgrades under the Energy Sense program have been retrofitted, according to the Joint Office of Sustainability for Grant County and Silver City. The year-long effort, which began in mid-September, is funded through a federal Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant. The money pays a staff of four to provide, at no cost to homeowners, an energy audit and such follow-up improvements as caulking, weather-stripping, plumbing insulation, faucet aerators, low-flow showerheads, and Compact Fluorescent Lightbulbs. The team educates residents about other ways to save energy, such as turning off unneeded lights, fixing toilet leaks, adding door sweeps, and washing dishes or clothes only when appliances have full loads.

Although any Grant County resident can request Energy Sense assistance, priority is given to those who earn less than \$45,000 a year, are disabled, or who are 65 or older. Applications are available at the Joint Office of Sustainability inside the Grant County Business and Conference Center (in Silver City, next to Ace Hardware on US 180) or by calling (575) 654.5117.

when they cooked or did laundry, and how heavy window drapes could hold heat inside at night during winter or block the daytime sun in summer. We also identified some safety issues of which they were unaware.”

According to Neil and members of her team, this residence was typical of many they visit, where simple, low-cost improvements can quickly and easily lead to reduced drafts, lowered utility bills, and less consumption of resources. Participating households also receive information on low-energy appliance rebates and various weatherization and housing rehab programs offered by local, state, and federal agencies. Viva Verde’s services have been provided on a first-come, first-served basis to those who responded from September through November. Project partners include the Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico, Silver City/Grant County Office of Sustainability, U.S. Department of Energy, and PNM.

“I’m definitely learning some useful ‘green’ job skills,” said Sandoval, as he placed pellets of dye in one of the mobile home’s toilet tank. (By coloring the water blue and tracing its seepage, silent but costly leaks can be detected.) “I do construction work and this internship has taught me a lot.”

Taking a break from changing faucet aerators, an easy way to reduce water usage, Ávila explained how the experience he’s getting complements his coursework at the university, where he studies electrical engineering. “I see lots of problems in the homes we visit,” said Ávila, “but I’m also seeing many ways to solve them in an energy-efficient way.”

The interns work one day each week and in some cases do outreach, while Neil schedules clients, researches products, organizes materials, buys and packs supplies, and drives the interns and their supply kits to participating homes. “Our visits seem very meaningful to those we serve,” Neil concluded. “They’re excited and grateful for our improvements, the comfort they provide, and the savings on their energy bills.”



VIVA VERDE INTERN GRACE JONES INSTALLS WEATHER-STRIPPING ON DEMING DOORWAY. (RICHARD MAHLER PHOTO)