

Energy independence is within reach

Written by Lalita Malik
Aug. 24, 2013 |

poughkeepsiejournal.com



Upcoming “Save Energy Save Dollars” sessions

Sept. 11: 6-8 p.m. at the Dover Plains Library. Visit:

Camille Theresa Marcotte gives a presentation at the Save Energy Save Dollars workshop conducted by Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County. / Photo courtesy of Lalita Malik

<http://saveenergysavedollarsdover.eventbrite.com/> or call 845-832-6605. **Sept. 17:** 10 a.m. to noon at the Poughkeepsie Friendship Center. Call 845-486-2804. **Oct. 2:** 7-9 p.m. at Adriance Library in Poughkeepsie. Visit: <http://saveenergysavedollarsadriance.eventbrite.com> or call 845-485-3445. **Oct. 10:** 6-8 p.m. at Grinnell Library in the Village of Wappingers Falls. Visit: <http://saveenergysavedollarsgrinnell.eventbrite.com> or call 845-297-3428. **Oct. 16:** 12:30-2 p.m. at the East Fishkill Friendship Center. Call 845-226-3605. For more information, contact Camille Marcotte at 845-677-8223, Ext. 138 or ctm78@cornell.edu

My journey toward energy independence started in May 2011, when I attended a session held by Allison Morrill Chatrchyan, environment and energy program leader at Cornell University Cooperative Extension Dutchess County.

Until then, I thought I knew a lot about energy savings and avoiding waste.

I thought I was doing all I could to save the environment.

I had the best windows available when our house was built in 1984, a new furnace with a programmable thermostat, lots of insulation in my attic, and a cover on my attic door.

I turned out lights when leaving rooms and had energy-efficient bulbs in the rooms I used most.

Air did not blow through my house like it did for some of the participants.

When I needed a new washing machine, I purchased an Energy Star washer.

I thought I was doing everything I should, that there was nothing more I could do, but I was wrong.

There was more.

At the session, I learned about small things I could do in addition to what I had already done.

I could add insulated covers over my electrical outlets to seal out any small seeps. I had a packet of them sitting on my table for two years that I had not bothered to install. I did not think I needed them. I felt no drafts.

Whoever heard of using childproof inserts in electric outlets to block out air coming through the plugs?

Chatrchyan talked about phantom energy used by appliances. I knew about that.

But I was not going to turn off my stoves and microwaves at the wall.

How would I ever get to the plugs?

I already had my computers, printers, cell phone and other chargers on strips that I turned off when I was not using them.

Then Allison mentioned pulling the plug on cable box receivers and digital video recorders because they use a lot of energy.

She suggested we feel the heat they emanated as proof.

There was more I could do.

My complaisance gone, I started to pay attention.

I learned about energy audits, available at no cost to homeowners through NYSERDA, which also offered low-interest loans for qualified energy improvements. This money was collected by a line-item on our electricity bill.

I picked up an application for an energy audit and the energy kit Chatrchyan gave out.

The audit was free, so why leave money on the table? I wanted a new project, and this was it.

My quest for energy independence had started.

In the series of articles about my quest, I will report on my energy audit, how I went from being a Good Neighbor in Central Hudson's report to a Great Neighbor electricity user, to becoming almost self-sufficient for electricity.

I will also discuss how I brought my oil bills down to one fourth for houses my size.

I did all this without sacrificing my comfort or my lifestyle.

I enjoyed the challenge, learned a lot and saved money.

Next week: The audit.

Lalita Malik is a member of the Dutchess County Environment Management Council.