

STIMULUS: Weatherization adds workers

FROM A1

federal stimulus act. It's designed to create green jobs, improve homes that leak energy like sieves and reduce utility bills.

"This is a lifesaver," said Ferguson, who lost his job as a heavy equipment operator and said he could never afford to do all the improvements needed on his home, built more than 50 years ago in the 2000 block of East 58th Street.

Michael Rains, leading the job for Home Performance Services at Ferguson's house, said it should help him cut his energy bills by at least 30 percent.

"That comes down to a lot of money," Rains said.

The work also included reinforcing the front door and installed energy-efficient light bulbs.

The weatherization program has existed since the 1970s as a low-profile anti-poverty program, and for years has provided about \$600,000 annually to low-income families in Kansas City.

But the stimulus act has ramped up the program in a big way, making more money available not just in Kansas City, but throughout Jackson, Clay, Platte, Wyandotte and Johnson counties.

"It's a huge increase," said Bob Jackson, Kansas City's manager of property preservation. "We're so excited and pleased about this opportunity to take weatherization from its closet."

Kansas City has been awarded about \$9 million in stimulus weatherization money to use before March 2012. That money is available for eligible property owners in Jackson, Clay and Platte counties, although most of the money is expected to be spent in Kansas City's urban core.

Jackson said that funding should be enough to provide improvements for about 1,500 homes.

The city also plans to apply next spring for an additional \$4 million to \$6 million that will be available for agencies that meet high performance standards, including completing more houses than expected.

There are other ways in which the program is more expansive than in the past:

■ The maximum annual income for an eligible family has increased to 200 percent of poverty level, up from 150 percent in the past. A single occu-



LOCAL

Before winter wind blows, stimulus money flows

Once a low-profile program, weatherization thrives with influx of federal money.

By LYNN HORSLEY
The Kansas City Star

Wendell Ferguson has shivered through recent Kansas City winters with a "rust bucket" furnace, a drafty home with thin walls and a gas fireplace barely cutting the chill.

But this week, two workers drilled holes and filled his stucco walls with insulation,

"Green" mortgages reward borrowers for living in energy-efficient homes. | A13

blew more insulation into his attic and sealed his basement with a new door. A new furnace is also on the way.

Ferguson is among the first of more than 1,000 area homeowners who will eventually have a chance to benefit from a huge infusion of new weatherization dollars, courtesy of the

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KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

The Kansas City home of Wendell Ferguson underwent numerous weatherization improvements this week. Michael Rains added insulation to the attic Thursday.

ON THE WEB

For more information about metro area weatherization services, go to the following Web sites:

- Jackson, Clay and Platte counties: www.kcmo.org/housing.nsf/web/proppres
- Wyandotte County: www.eckan.org
- Johnson County: hsa.jocogov.org/housing/weatherization.shtml

pant can make up to \$21,660 annually, and a family of four can make up to \$44,100.

■ Each property can receive more improvements. In the past, Kansas City could spend, on average, about \$3,500 per home. That amount has risen to \$6,500, on average, per property.

Money is available for rental properties if the owner agrees to pay 50 percent of the cost. In addition, to furnaces and insulation, the improvements can include window repairs or replacements, caulking, weatherstripping, ductwork and water heaters.

Jackson said about 165 home improvement jobs are already under way and at least 100 should be completed by the end of November. He expects contractors to complete 20 jobs or more per week.

U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, a Kansas City Democrat, has touted weatherization as a major part of his "Green Zone" idea to rebuild a 150-block area of the urban core. But Jackson said only a handful of the

weatherization jobs so far are in the Green Zone neighborhoods.

The program involves both pre-inspections to make sure homes can truly benefit from the work and post-inspections to make sure it was done properly.

"We're not going to take public money and waste it," Jackson said.

For Wyandotte County residents, the program is administered by the East Central Kansas Economic Opportunity Corp., a community action agency that also serves Douglas, Miami and 10 other counties. In the past, Wyandotte County has gotten about \$500,000 annually for weatherization work. The stimulus funds should boost that amount by about \$600,000 over the next few years, said Richard Jackson, chief executive officer of ECKAN.

"We should be able to help significantly more people than in the past," he said.

Johnson County government expects to receive an addi-

tional \$1.89 million through March 2012, which more than doubles its annual weatherization allocation of about \$500,000, according to Stacy Copeland, the county's director of housing services. The county expects to weatherize an additional 300 homes with that money.

"It will help us make a lot more homeowners more comfortable," Copeland said.

The weatherization effort is also creating jobs, including some new government inspectors and administrators, but mainly people to actually do the weatherization work.

Clyde McQueen, president and CEO of the Full Employment Council, said about 20 people have been placed in jobs after receiving training through his agency.

He said the Full Employment Council, Metropolitan Energy Center and University of Central Missouri have developed a six-week course to get people trained quickly as job openings emerge.

Kansas City has also won a stimulus grant through the Environmental Protection Agency that will provide training for about 100 people, ages 18 to 24, which should equip them to get weatherization jobs anywhere in the country, said Thalia Cherry, the city's youth advocacy manager.

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