



Making Affordable Housing Green

Bill Lazar, Executive Director of St. Johns Housing Partnership (SJHP), was presented the 2012 Florida Housing Coalition **Outstanding Achievement Award** at the Annual Conference.



Bill Lazar (R), St. Johns Housing Partnership Executive Director, receives the Outstanding Achievement Award from George Romagnoli (L), FHC Chair.



SJHP volunteers build and install ramps in addition to repairing substandard housing.

The Florida Housing Coalition interviewed Lazar, who has worked with affordable housing programs in Duval, St. Johns and Clay counties for 24 years, about the SJHP weatherization and energy efficiency lessons learned, future of green building with affordable housing, and the importance of networks working together.

What lessons were learned during the three-year weatherization program?

Weatherization training on building performance has been enhanced by three years of increased production for SJHP. During the past three years, we were able to help 1,600 people who were living in substandard conditions. This volume of work honed our skills and understanding about building performance.

The “whole house” approach to building performance evaluates how each efficiency upgrade impacts the home’s performance and impacts other planned upgrades. Our team has learned to look at actual performance versus manufacturer’s claims, giving us a common sense approach to the world of green that

The SJHP accomplished the amazing feat of weatherizing almost 1,211 multi-family units in 34 communities within 16 counties (in a one year time span); successfully meeting federal expenditure requirements as part of Florida’s weatherization program, with state weatherization agencies, coordinating \$176 million in stimulus funds weatherizing 26,000 homes. In addition, the SJHP provided financial counseling to 600 families, of which 156 had their mortgages modified, developed and operated energy efficient rental units, and oversaw a volunteer program that installed ramps with staff, volunteers and subcontractors who repaired 815 substandard homes in 2011.



SJHP has been active with weatherization and energy efficiency projects in 16 counties. Seen here installing solar panels and new Energy Star air conditioners.

The SJHP believes strongly that all affordable housing efforts should strive for energy efficient housing. Affordable housing is defined as typically costing no more than 30% of a household's gross income on gross housing costs, including utilities. By making homes more energy-efficient, owners can see a reduction in housing costs.

Concentrating on building performance at the beginning means identifying what really can be cost effective ways to reduce a utility bill, and improve the indoor air

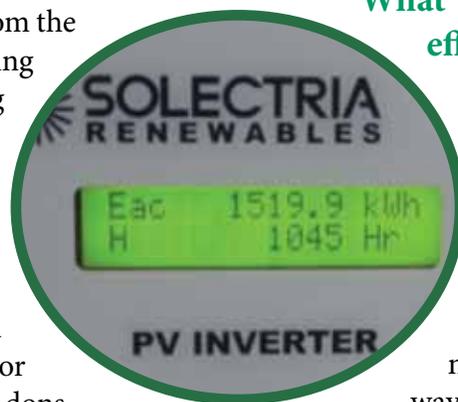
provides financial, environmental, and community benefits.

Hancock Place is a workforce housing neighborhood of 36 eco-friendly and green certified homes built by SJHP six years ago. Energy efficiency and water conservation were a vital part of the plan from the beginning. Those components are normally seen in higher-end developments.

Thanks to a renewable energy grant from the Florida Energy Office, SJHP is monitoring several of the homes as an ongoing conservation and energy efficiency study. This is a unique opportunity to monitor what is essentially the same model home in the subdivision. Data will be collected daily over two years to determine which retrofit provided the most improved efficiency. For example, a standard hot water heater dons a sticker from the manufacturer, which says the yearly average operating cost is \$508. A heat pump water heater displays a manufacturer sticker claiming to only cost the user \$198 a year. The experiment aims to see if those numbers are accurate and will also determine the impact of occupants' habits on these numbers. In addition, we increase our experience by analyzing cost effective ways to move toward a zero energy home in Hancock Place.

quality, before you start spending money on replacing what you "think" are leaky doors and windows. Test and verify. This is why we used energy raters to evaluate the scope of work on our apartment complex projects. We wanted third party confirmation that where we would spend the money is where we would see reduced utility bills.

What does the future hold for energy efficiency and green building for affordable housing with reduced funding and resources?



Some people suggest that it is the wrong time to focus on energy efficiency and green building because of increased costs. It is more important now than ever to focus on cost effective ways to reduce energy consumption and provide a better product for our consumers. An important aspect of sustainability is about long-term reduced maintenance costs. Green building is not always more expensive, there are many construction practices that are low cost that improve home performance. The difference is in the choices made and the evaluation of why specific choices are made. When we built Hancock Place, we focused on high energy efficiency and water conservation to achieve FGBC green certification.

Those combined measures cost us less than \$3,500 per home and produced homes that were, on average, 15% more efficient than if built to the Florida Energy Code.

With so much focus on purchase and rehab of foreclosed properties and the future of multi-family preservation projects in Florida, there are great reasons to focus on energy conservation during the initial inspections. First, we need trained inspectors who understand building performance. Building performance requires looking at the house as a system. Adding insulation or changing the HVAC system, without knowing how airtight the house is, can create indoor air quality problems. We believe it is not best for the community to help someone purchase a nicely rehabbed home, with an affordable mortgage, if they are going to have a \$200/month electric bill. Especially if a simple repair on leaky duct work could reduce their electric bill by 25%.

There are a number of weatherization and energy programs. What do you think is needed to take full advantage of the available programs?

The most critical part is building the right local team of partners that help you think through the entire process. It's not just finding other financing programs, but if we do not do the work properly, the funding will eventually fall apart, for lack of verifiable results.

Choosing the right consultants and inspectors, is the same as the process you go through to find the right contractor and subcontractors for your projects. Green building, done right, is the future of the building industry, especially in Florida with our hot, humid climate. And there are different climate zones in Florida where different choices make a difference.

We are fortunate to have several networks of energy and green building professionals who can be found in almost any county in the state. Most of them would be glad to provide a free demonstration or analysis of how to properly analyze a home to show your current team how green building and energy efficiency is cost effective. Many of them can also provide educational and marketing suggestions to help educate the skeptics.

We also need these networks to join our efforts to ask for full appropriation of the Housing Trust Funds. If the Housing Trust Funds are fully appropriated for housing programs, it will create a tremendous economic impact

in Florida with many construction jobs, and that could include building performance professionals. According to the Sadowski Coalition, the appropriation of the estimated \$175.2 million in the state and local housing trust funds in Fiscal Year 2013-14 into Florida's housing programs will create 13,470 jobs and \$1.341 billion in positive economic impact in Florida.

Florida's affordable housing programs have already been part of the green building success stories. Florida Housing Finance Corporation requires some level of energy or green certification in all of their housing programs, both multi-family and single family. HUD has also been requiring energy efficiency in NSP 2 and 3. We need to promote energy efficiency whenever affordable housing rehab is undertaken, especially in programs that pre-date our understanding of the importance of energy efficiency, such as CDGB. There are cost effective ways to do this, you just need the right partners.

What can we do to advocate for green building and energy efficiency?

The Energy Office is looking for business partners who can provide energy efficient success stories. There is strong support for energy conservation and green building in the HUD and USDA housing programs. But in some cases, the state leadership is reluctant to mandate improved building performance measures, without knowing there are sufficient partners to make sure the programs work well.

We need everyone to share their stories and for you to encourage your business partners to tell their stories to reassure the state's leadership that energy efficiency is the future.

Resources:

Florida Green Building Coalition (FGBC) - <http://www.floridagreenbuilding.org/>

Florida Weatherization Network - <http://flwap.org/>
Building Energy Assessment Professionals (BEAP) - <http://www.beapfl.org/home>

U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) - <http://www.usgbcnf.org/>

Association of Energy Engineers (AEE) - <http://www.aeecenter.org> HNN