



## LIFE...Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Low-Income Forum on Energy (LIFE) Newsletter. This issue provides useful energy efficiency information, spotlights consumer advocates assisting low-income energy consumers and highlights the many LIFE Steering Committee initiatives focused on the energy needs of low-income consumers in New York State.

The LIFE Newsletter, which will be produced quarterly, is one example of how LIFE has grown since its inception in 1998, when the Public Service Commission created the LIFE Steering Committee to initiate a statewide dialogue on the needs of low-income energy consumers. Throughout its formative years, the LIFE Steering Committee has maintained a strong dialogue on issues affecting low-income energy consumers, including energy efficiency, state and utility energy assistance programs and consumer education through its statewide conferences and regional meetings. The LIFE Steering Committee, which includes state agencies, consumer advocates, community-based organizations and utility companies, ensures that the dialogue continues to be a priority.

Today, the LIFE dialogue continues to grow stronger as the LIFE Steering Committee remains committed to and focused on low-income energy issues, launches its new electronic newsletter, produces an enhanced and expanded web site, expands the diversity of the Steering Committee membership and plans upcoming regional meetings.

Tomorrow, LIFE will be taking its show on the road with a series of regional meetings across the state. As we go forward, remember that LIFE's continued growth depends on you. Please get involved, provide us with feedback and plan to join us in May 2007 at one of our regional meetings.

Pamela Carter,  
Chairperson LIFE Steering Committee

### 2007 LIFE Regional Meetings

Mark your calendar today for the 2007 LIFE Regional Meetings. This year's theme is "Saving Energy, Saving Dollars". We'll provide more information in the next LIFE Newsletter, but in the meantime, Save the Date!

- May 1** .....Western New York  
Batavia
- May 2** .....North Country  
Watertown
- May 3** .....Central/Southern Tier  
Johnson City
- May 9** .....Capital Region  
Queensbury
- May 10** .....Hudson Valley  
Kingston
- May 15** .....New York City

## NYC High School Students Ask for Your Help



Energy conservation is of critical importance to NYC's environment, economy and overall quality of life, and the responsibility to save energy lies with each one of us.

Fortunately, there are a number of simple steps that every New Yorker can take to reduce their own energy consumption without sacrificing comfort, quality or convenience.

A group of students are taking this mission seriously and inviting others to help.

While participating in ongoing skill-building training at Manhattan Comprehensive Night and Day High School, the students have started Tru Light, a unique energy conservation initiative designed to educate New Yorkers about the critical importance of energy conservation and provide an immediate resource for taking action.

The Tru Light program gives New Yorkers a means to reduce their individual impact on the environment, save energy, save money and help others by simply switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs), which last up to 10 times longer than conventional bulbs, and save 66% of the electricity typically used.

In addition to distributing literature and providing demonstrations, the Tru Light team offers high quality CFLs at below average retail costs. Proceeds are donated in part to the Solar Electric Light Foundation ([www.SELF.org](http://www.SELF.org)), an international non-profit organization that manages and finances renewable energy projects in the developing world. To date, the Tru Light team has brought its unique mission to locations all over the city, including Grand Central Station, the lobbies of the Empire State Building and the U.S. Federal Building at 290 Broadway.

Tru Light is seeking new venues and they need your help. They invite your organization to support their mission by hosting an outreach activity at anytime during the year. It's easy!

Outreach activities typically involve 3-5 students providing literature, information and CFLs at a small table. Events last 2-4 hours, depending on the host and the nature of the venue. A wonderful venue is a small amount of space in office building lobbies during the business day.

If your organization is interested in providing outreach opportunities for the Tru Light team, please contact Solar One outreach coordinator Chris Neidl at [neidl@solar1.org](mailto:neidl@solar1.org) or 212-505-6050.

For further information about Solar One or Manhattan Comprehensive Night and Day High School please visit: [www.solar1.org](http://www.solar1.org) or [www.mancomp.org](http://www.mancomp.org)

## HEAP Benefits Many New Yorkers

*By Paula Cook and Greg Abel, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance*

New Yorkers in-need received a total of \$356.24M in new federal funding during the 2005-2006 Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) season. This federally funded program assists low-income New Yorkers in meeting their home energy needs. It is comprised of four components: Regular Benefit, Emergency Benefit, Furnace Repair/Replacement, and Weatherization.

The Regular Benefit and Emergency Benefit components of HEAP operated from November 1, 2005 through May 15, 2006. The Furnace Repair/Replacement component ran from October 1, 2005 to September 30, 2006. The Weatherization component currently runs year round, depending upon funding.

During the 2005-2006 HEAP season, many low-income New Yorkers received assistance.

- \$156M to over 856,000 low-income New Yorkers to assist with their energy costs.
- \$100M to over 286,000 New Yorkers to resolve energy emergency situations.
- \$6.3M to over 3,702 for Furnace Repairs/Replacements.
- \$53.39M was allocated to the Department of Housing and Community Renewal to weatherize homes.

The HEAP 2006-2007 season is currently up and running. New York uses the maximum income limits allowed under federal law, which for a household of up to 10 members is 60 percent of the State Median

HEAP Benefits Many New Yorkers continued

Income, and for a household of 11 or more is 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

In order to provide a more meaningful benefit to low-income New Yorkers, there were a couple of changes for the current season:

- An increase in point value that is used to calculate the benefit amount of applicants that pay for their energy costs directly. The increase from \$50 to \$55 per point has raised the maximum Regular HEAP benefit from \$400 to \$440.

- An increase in the base benefit amount for an emergency fuel delivery from \$400 to \$500. This change was implemented in response to the increasing cost of securing a minimum fuel delivery.
- The HEAP Energy Proxy Chart, which is used to calculate a HEAP benefit by determining a household's energy burden, was also updated to reflect the current costs of energy by primary fuel type.

For more information go to:  
[www.otda.state.ny.us/otda/heap](http://www.otda.state.ny.us/otda/heap)

## EmPower New York<sup>SM</sup> Offering Financial Management and Energy Use Education Workshops throughout New York State

The EmPower New York<sup>SM</sup> program, managed by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), provides cost-effective energy reduction measures, emphasizing energy education as a means to assist households in managing their energy costs.

As part of its strategy, the EmPower New York<sup>SM</sup> program is providing 600 Financial Management and Energy Use Education workshops annually throughout New York State. The two-hour workshops are conducted by the Cornell Cooperative Extension and are open to all households regardless of income. They can be a great asset to advocates and low-income households alike.

Three workshop topics are offered. **Save Energy, Save Dollars** focuses on low-cost and no-cost ways to save energy and reduce energy bills. This workshop also introduces programs that can help qualified households afford energy-efficiency improvements with subsidies, low-interest loans or free services. Participants receive a free kit of energy efficiency materials such as outlet and light switch gaskets and a high efficiency faucet aerator.

**Making Ends Meet** shows participants how to develop and use a household spending plan. Ways to maximize resources and reduce energy consumption are also explored. Participants receive a free money management kit.

**Exploring Credit/Debt Management Issues** provides information on selecting and using credit wisely. Strategies for paying down debt, obtaining and reviewing a credit report and understanding a credit score are also shared. Participants receive free credit management tools.

The workshops are free, however space is limited so pre-registration is required. For an up to date schedule of workshops and registration information, please visit [www.ccetompkins.org/EmPowerNY](http://www.ccetompkins.org/EmPowerNY) or contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at 607-272-2292.

For more information on services provided through EmPower New York<sup>SM</sup> or for an Energy Services Application please visit [www.getenergysmart.org](http://www.getenergysmart.org).



## Helping: One Family at a Time

*By Susan West, KeySpan Energy Delivery*

At age 72, Mrs. J, caretaker of her mother (age 91), her frail husband, Peter (age 84) and her unemployed granddaughter (age 23) was becoming overwhelmed with the physical and emotional stress of her role. The day the collector arrived to “collect or terminate” utility service added to her realization of the vast debt the family had accrued.

Mrs. J was referred to her utility’s advocacy services in May, 2003. Realizing how desperately she needed help, Mrs. J was receptive to assistance and agreed to work with an advocate in an effort to stabilize and ease the stressful situation.

The service plan designed for Mrs. J was extensive and included: assessing eligibility for energy assistance programs; applying for the energy fund in her area; applying for Medicaid to resolve Jack’s medical bills; financial counseling; and referral for an energy audit and supportive counseling. Mrs. J qualified to have her refrigerator replaced and her electric usage decreased accordingly. She willingly negotiated with creditors regarding settlement/dismissal of debt. Unfortunately, she soon was in a position where she had to work with the Veteran’s Administration to access burial benefits when her husband Peter died.

Mrs. J benefited from ongoing home visits and counseling sessions. They offered support and encouragement, and she was helped to examine behaviors that contributed to her financial struggle. In time, she recognized that financial support of her granddaughter was detrimental to both of them and she learned to resist the need to “rescue” her namesake in every crisis. She used insurance money for necessary home improvements and bills, and budgets to meet fixed expenses, including her mortgage, utilities, car payment, insurance, phone and food. She recently began a weekend job, after a brief volunteer endeavor, to supplement her income.

Since Mrs. J first met with the advocate, she has experienced many losses. Her husband, a close sister-in-law and her mother have all died. Her granddaughter moved to California. Although she is now alone, Mrs. J is resilient at age 75. She strives to achieve economic security, maintain friendships and plan for her own future.

She now meets with the advocate once a month to discuss matters of concern. Mrs. J, who once owed \$1,120 on her utility bill, is pleased to be paying on time. She has greater confidence in her abilities and an improved quality of life knowing the utility company cares.

## Ben Wiles: A Voice for Vulnerable New Yorkers

*By Virginia Walsh, LIPA/REAP*

When something changes for the better in the programs designed to help low-income households having trouble with their utility bills, have you ever wondered how that change happened? Many times changes are proposed or advanced by advocates working formally or informally with State agencies or the legislative process. In New York, one of the strongest of these advocates is the Public Utility Law Project (PULP). At PULP, Ben Wiles, Senior Attorney, a smart and dedicated advocate for New Yorkers struggling with energy costs and choices, is making a difference.

PULP is an organization “dedicated to advancing the interests of low income and rural consumers in energy, telecommunications and other utility-related matters”. <http://www.pulp.tc> Through his work at PULP, Ben provides a voice when State policies are made concerning vulnerable New Yorkers: people with lower incomes, senior citizens, residents of rural areas without easy access to utility choices and anyone concerned with the balance between energy affordability and healthy options for the environment.

In 2006, for example, Ben worked closely with AARP on its survey measuring the impact of rising energy costs on senior citizens in New York. He then used

the resulting information to advocate successfully with the New York State Legislature for \$100 million in additional energy assistance to low-income and older New Yorkers.

In addition to seeking immediate relief for our most vulnerable neighbors, Ben has his eye on the long-term interests of New Yorkers, including the effects of global warming. In May 2006, while speaking on carbon dioxide emission reduction programs, Ben documented the need to balance “the substantial consumer interests in effective programs to reduce, over time, carbon emissions and the traditional consumer interests in assuring that the price of electricity be just and reasonable and affordable for low-income households.”

As PULP’s representative on the LIFE Steering Committee for over six years, Ben has consistently offered a clearly expressed and valuable perspective. As an example, at a recent Steering Committee meet-

ing, Ben turned the discussion to the need to extend and strengthen low income utility rates for gas and electricity. While LIFE is not the forum where such questions will be resolved, it provided a useful opportunity to advance the discussion on this issue. In Ben’s view, “Policy making initiatives can begin in many different places. The policy change itself will likely come from a formal decision at a State agency or the legislature. The shape of that change, however, and the process of its development will often begin in a more informal setting. For the low income energy issues on which I work, LIFE is one of these important informal settings.”

New York needs a thoughtful response to our energy challenges, and advocates for low income New Yorkers need to be part of the dialogue. Ben Wiles is a thoughtful, compassionate and knowledgeable person who keeps raising the questions that need to be heard.

## Give the Gift of Energy

*By Elizabeth Katz, New York State Department of Public Service*

So often we are unsure of what to give someone for a gift. The next time you are in that situation, why not consider giving the gift of energy. It’s appropriate for any occasion and comes in many forms – from providing financial assistance to helping to reduce energy usage and costs. Below are a few energy gift ideas for you to consider.

Sponsored by utility companies, supported by their customers and managed by non-profit organizations, these programs directly help people in need with their energy bills.

### **Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation**

- Purchase a gift certificate for any amount you choose and give it to someone who needs assistance paying their utility bill.
- Give to Central Hudson’s Good Neighbor Fund which provides a “last resort” grant to help pay the energy bills of customers who have exhausted all other forms of public and private assistance.

### **Consolidated Edison Company of New York, Inc.**

- Buy a toy fleet replica. Your purchase directly supports its EnergyShare Fund which assists eligible customers with their energy bills.
- You can help keep the heat and lights on for a neighbor in need. Con Edison’s EnergyShare program, which is administered by HeartShare Human Services of New York, helps eligible, low-income customers pay outstanding Con Edison bills. Your tax-deductible contribution will be matched by Con Edison.

### **KeySpan Corporation**

- In New York City, give to KeySpan’s Neighborhood Heating Fund. Your tax deductible contribution to HeartShare’s Neighborhood Heating Fund helps people living in KeySpan’s New York City territory.
- The United Way of Long Island’s Project Warmth administers KeySpan’s energy fund, available to help those in need on Long Island.

*Give the Gift of Energy continued*

### **National Grid**

- Give to National Grid's Care & Share Fund, which helps the elderly, disabled and those facing medical emergencies pay fuel bills when no other assistance is available.

### **National Fuel Gas Distribution Company**

- Make a donation to National Fuel's Neighbor for Neighbor Fund, a special fund for people living in National Fuel's territory, who are 60 years of age or older, or themselves or a member of the household has a handicap or disability that reduces the household income or have a certified medical emergency.

### **New York State Electric & Gas**

- Make a donation to the American Red Cross earmarked for NYSEG's Project Share program, which helps eligible customers pay for energy emergencies such as fuel bills, repairs to heating equipment, home weatherization and water heater replacements.
- Add an additional dollar amount when paying your utility bill; NYSEG will forward the money directly to the Red Cross for you.

### **Orange & Rockland Utilities, Inc.**

- Make a donation to O&R's Neighbor Fund, which provides financial assistance to customers who find themselves temporarily unable to pay their home-heating bills because of emergency conditions.

### **Rochester Gas & Electric Corporation**

- Make a donation to the The Red Cross/RG&E Heating Fund, administered by the American Red Cross Greater Rochester Chapter. This is an emergency energy assistance program which specifically targets those who are not eligible for government assistance programs, such as HEAP.

### **Gifts from the Local Hardware or Department Store**

- Buy a low-flow showerhead for someone to help save energy and water.
- Give energy efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs to reduce electric use.
- Give someone a warm blanket or two to wrap up in rather than turning up the heat.

For more information on the programs and ideas suggested, contact your local utility company.

**Happy Giving!**



## **LIFE Steering Committee**

- New York State Department of Public Service
- Association for Energy Affordability
- Cattaraugus Community Action
- Central Hudson Gas and Electric Corporation
- Community Energy Services, Inc.
- Community Power Network of New York State
- Consolidated Edison Company of New York
- Dutchess County Community Action Agency, Inc.
- KeySpan Energy Delivery
- LIPA/REAP
- National Fuel Gas Distribution Company
- National Grid
- New York State Consumer Protection Board
- New York State Department of State Division of Community Services
- New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal
- New York State Electric and Gas
- New York State Energy Research and Development Authority
- New York State Office for Aging
- New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
- New York State Weatherization Directors' Association
- Public Utility Law Project
- Orange and Rockland Utilities, Inc.
- Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation

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**For more information: [www.lifenews.org](http://www.lifenews.org)**