

Thursday, Oct. 2, 2008

## Community learns how to make environmentally friendly home upgrades

by Letita Aaron | Special to The Gazette

As Dan Simmons sat on a soggy patch of grass, placing the pole of a retractable clothesline into a small pool of freshly poured concrete, he mused over his wife's possible reluctance to have one installed in their own backyard.

"It's called a solar clothes dryer," the Hyattsville handyman said, pointing at the long box the clothesline came in. "I didn't even know about them until I bought this one yesterday. I don't think my wife would go for it, but I think it's kind of nice."

Simmons was one of 30 volunteers who made energy-saving improvements to Mamie and Charles Small's Hyattsville home Saturday as part of the Green Jobs Now National Day of Action. Green Jobs Now, a national partnership of Green For All, the WE campaign and 1Sky, is an initiative designed to promote the creation of jobs requiring environmental or 'green' skills as a way to create a sustainable economy, aid local communities, and save the environment.

The Smalls' home energy makeover was one of 665 events scheduled nationwide in celebration of the National Day of Action. Locally, Progressive Cheverly, Greenmodeling, Community Forklift, CCAN Chesapeake Climate Action Network and Jwanzaa Youth Partnership sponsored the event.

According to Lisa Lincoln, co-chairwoman of the Progressive Cheverly Environmental Committee, events like the National Day of Action prove that learning green skills can aid in building a stronger economy by increasing job opportunities and giving people like Simmons more opportunities to make a living wage.

Sen. David Harrington (D-Dist. 47) of Cheverly said initiatives like Green Jobs Now play a large part in correcting an economic system that benefits fewer people each day.

"[What] the example that we're setting today [is] saying is we need a different kind of economy," Harrington said during a news conference held in the Smalls' backyard. "An economy that's inclusive, an economy that's engaged, an economy that changes people's lives. That's what we want."

During the five-hour event, volunteers, with help from Edmonston Mayor Adam Ortiz and Harrington, made modifications identified during a home energy audit conducted by Greenmodeling, a Cheverly-based green building firm. Volunteers planted a raised-bed vegetable garden, weatherized windows, insulated the hot water heater and supply pipes, replaced incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents, installed low-flow shower heads and plugged electronics into surge protectors. Professional contractors added an additional six inches of insulation to the Smalls' attic, their labor and materials donated to the project. Most of the materials used were donated by local businesses as well. According to estimates from the audit, the modifications will save the Smalls an average of \$1,000 to \$1,500 a year.

While some might be reluctant to spend the time and the money to make the changes necessary to make

their homes more energy efficient, Mamie Small, 59, said she hopes her willingness to try something new may inspire others.

"This means a lot to my family, and it will add to the betterment of this community if other families will do the same thing," she said during the news conference. "With a little help and encouragement, I believe lots of families will want to do what these wonderful volunteers will be doing to my house today."

Charles Small, 61, echoed his wife's sentiments but added the number of people involved in the project, especially those from Jwanzaa Youth Partnership, impressed him as well.

"I'm so amazed at the young people," he said. "People always want to talk about the bad things kids do, [but] you don't always see young people like this, young people with good training. Maybe when they get older they'll have someone help them out this way. When you do good, it'll come back to you."