

Middle Way project helps spotlight green alternatives

Solar panels, other features make New Wings renovation plan environmentally friendly

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Federal legislation aimed at boosting the growth of environmentally friendly industries and technologies could have local ramifications, including creating more jobs and giving local businesses a stronger focus on green options like solar power.

That was the message at Friday's Environmental Defense Fund event at Middle Way House's new home on South Washington Street. The agency has been working for months on its New Wings project to renovate the old Coca-Cola Bottling Co. building there and build offices, an emergency shelter, kitchen and day care featuring green details like solar panels and a rooftop garden.

"I think there's a wonderful connectivity in this project," state Environmental Defense Fund representative Rick Cockrum said. "That the community would provide a safe environment for women and children, and do it in an environmentally conscientious way."

He was joined by David Mann of Mann Plumbing, the local company installing the solar panels at the old Coke plant that will heat a portion of Middle Way House's new facilities and all of its hot water.

"I want to encourage public officials to ... have a vision for the future that would allow the U.S. to be a leader in the energy revolution," he said. "As for local businesses, additional tax incentives for solar energy ... would be a tremendous boost."

Dan Killion with Sherlock Homes Inspection Services Inc. said his company offers home and commercial energy audits, but said additional funding could mean more training for employees and perhaps allow him to hire new workers to retrofit local buildings for energy savings. "It's time to act now," he said. "We need to get together and go."

Monroe County Commissioner Mark Stoops also attended the event. An Environmental Defense Fund news release said he'd pointed out a recent federal bailout package including tax credits for companies that produce energy efficient appliances is helping the local GE plant stay open longer than its expected first quarter 2010 closure date.

"As shown with the revitalization of the GE plant, investment in a green infrastructure and energy conservation will keep us on the cutting edge of economic growth," Stoops said in the release.

Middle Way House's new facility is expected to open later this year, executive director Toby Strout said.

The project is expected to cost about \$5 million, and includes an emergency shelter for abused women and their children, offices, a day care, a kitchen for Middle Way's FoodWorks business that will also serve as an incubator for small-business owners, and affordable housing for women without children.

Green details include a rooftop garden, a cistern system to capture rainwater for the garden, and bee colonies, Strout said.

David Mann says additional tax incentives for solar energy would provide a significant boost for alternative energy programs and local business. Mann Plumbing installed the solar panels on the Middle Way House project, with this array designed to heat water. David Snodgrass | Herald-Times



Toby Strout, director of Middle Way House, talks about the project. Behind her are Charlotte Zietlow, left, and Iris Kiesling.
David Snodgrass | Herald-Times

