

Simon announces opening of new training facility

Written by Justin Stofferahn

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Will improve efforts to train workers for green jobs

CHAMPAIGN – October 16, 2012. Lt. Governor Sheila Simon announced the opening of a new facility at the University of Illinois that will help improve training for workers that weatherize homes through a state program that offers low-income residents an opportunity to improve their homes' energy efficiency.

During a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the 6,700 square foot Indoor Climate Research and Training Center, Simon, who serves as Governor Quinn's point person on education reform, said the center will help better prepare workers for green jobs in the Illinois Home Weatherization Assistance Program (IHWAP) through increased hands-on training.

"In order to compete for the jobs of the 21st Century our workers need the right training," Simon said. "This new training facility will provide workers with the hands-on training needed for jobs in home weatherization, allowing them to ensure families maximize the potential to lower their energy bills and live more comfortably."

The training facility will provide classroom space and hands-on application areas for trainees completing the Weatherization Training and Certification Program at the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center located in Champaign. Graduates will provide weatherization services to

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low income families that qualify for assistance from IHWAP.

Trainees include weatherization subcontractors and staff from the 35 not-for-profit organizations across the state that the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity works with to administer the assistance program. The organizations identify applicants, evaluate homes, determine the scope of work and contract with weatherization contractors to complete work. Contractors use the training they receive to bid for both IHWAP and private-sector weatherization projects.

The assistance program provides free weatherization services including air sealing, attic and wall insulation, furnace repairs or replacements and window and door work to low-income families. Over the last three years the program has weatherized over 42,000 homes, with nearly 20,000 homes weatherized in the past year. Weatherization typically reduces household energy consumption by 12 to 25 percent and improves indoor environmental health and safety, according to DCEO.

“The Indoor Climate Research and Training Center will help put people to work making low-income homes more comfortable for residents,” said David Vaught, director of the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. “The program marks an important economic opportunity for the state and prepares workers for jobs in Illinois’ expanding green economy.”

Funding for the training center was provided by the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Illinois Jobs Now! capital construction program. The facility will feature props, videos and other interactive materials that will enhance the hands-on training for weatherization assessors and workers, according to Manohar Kulkarni, the director of the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center (ISTC) at the University of Illinois.

The training currently is offered to ISTC-related subcontractors, but going forward the certificate program will be open to the public, Kulkarni said.

“The ISTC has been proud to partner with DCEO to provide the most up-to-date training for workers providing services for the IHWAP program,” said Kulkarni. “Over the last year we have trained about 300 individuals who took 900 training classes. Over the five years the same

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numbers are 600 and 2500, respectively. These are impressive indeed and the new facility will allow us to expand upon those efforts including research on indoor human health and comfort issues in buildings.”

The ISTC houses the weatherization training program and is among the five state scientific surveys at the Prairie Research Institute. The other surveys are the Illinois Natural History Survey, Illinois State Archaeological Survey, Illinois State Geological Survey and the Illinois State Water Survey.

Following the ribbon-cutting Simon chaired a meeting of the Illinois River Coordinating Council, which works closely with the ISTC to promote the environmental and economic health of the Illinois River and its tributaries. The council is composed of a diverse group of citizens, not-for-profit organizations, and state and federal agencies, and holds quarterly meetings across the state to gather local input on conservation issues.

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