

## **Energy Trailblazer of the Month: Betsy Hague.**

“With three kids and three grandkids and a slew of family nearby, everyone piles into our home and I love it,” says Betsy. “A full house keeps me alive and excited with life,” she beamed. Yet, upkeep and overhead for this lovely rambling four bedroom home was expensive and Betsy started thinking about how she could best insure that she could continue to enjoy her home for years to come.

“My husband is 86 and has Alzheimer’s, and I have my own health issues, so the last 4-5 years I have worked hard to repair and do everything possible to make our home as energy efficient, knowing that when I reached 65, we may need to live on a fixed income.” Being careful with our overhead expenses like energy costs is one clear, and easy way to make living here in this lovely house possible for years to come.

With electric bills over \$400 per month in summer and mammoth natural gas bills as high as \$720 per month in the winter, Betsy came to believe that given the size, style and age of her home, cutting her energy costs is key to cutting her monthly expenses. “Our house was wonderful with high ceilings and big windows, but the contractor who built the addition for the previous owner had cut corners and we had been paying the price in terms of high energy bills,” she explained.

By making some pragmatic changes the couple was able to cut their energy bills by two-thirds while making their home more comfortable on a day-to-day basis. Betsy says her home is now dramatically cooler in summer and “like a warm down comforter in winter.” Here is how she got there:

- **Window Low-E film**– Betsy already high energy efficiency windows downstairs but the orientation of their much loved, sun-lit kitchen and breakfast area meant the room was often too hot to use. They’d have to crank up the A/C until the rest of the house was too cold in order to be comfortable in the kitchen. She had transparent, professionally-applied “low-E” window film installed to cut down on the heat gain through the windows. Such low-E film costs about 1/10th the price of window replacement.

“We literally saw a 20 degree drop in temperature the day after the window film was applied, it was fantastic,” according to Betsy. She used Classic Window Tinting in Rockville.

- **Ceiling Fans** – Betsy added eight of them, one in each bedroom and kitchen and living areas where the family spends a lot of time. Given the home’s high ceilings, the fans were a huge help: “before the ceiling fans we’d have one room boiling and the other freezing and the window fans evened everything out.”

- **Attic Insulation & Attic Fan** – Betsy added fiberglass insulation in the attic and added an attic fan to control the attic temperature in the summer, both of which cut down on how hard the air conditioner had to work, lowering her cooling costs.

- **Right-sizing the A/C Condenser** – Betsy’s A/C condenser had been too small for her house and as a result it was constantly working, drawing electricity. By replacing it with a larger unit that wasn’t always on, she was able to cut A/C costs in the summer by more than 60%. She purchased a Carrier high efficiency A/C with a cooling capacity of 3600 BTUh.

- **Tankless Water Heater** - Tired of running out of hot water when family was over, when Betsy’s old water heaters quit she bought a tankless unit that only heats up water as needed. Calling the

tankless water heater “the find of her life,” she recommends choosing a supplier who not only installs but also services the equipment and highly recommends Ed Clark - [Tankless-Concepts](#). Switching to a tankless system cut Betsy’s natural gas usage by about 10X during peak usage months.

- Smartstrips – Betsy plugged all her major appliances and electronics into smartstrips. She has her computer, lamp, printer/fax/copier machine on one strip that she turns off every night as well as another in the family room for the TV and FiOS cable box. “I used to think it would be a big pain, especially turning off and on the cable box, but it is so easy. The FiOS is fast and with just one switch everything shuts down at the end of the day,” she says. “It’s a simple thing that adds up over time.”

Betsy feels very lucky to have been able to reduce her energy use dramatically. Based on this experience she has been supporting a nonprofit called Rebuilding Together that helps seniors and disabled stay in their homes and has continued to find ways of cutting energy use including joining the community solar Co-op, co-founded by her neighbor Ketch Ryan and Kirk Renaud, and installing solar panels on her roof.

Energy Tip of the Month: **Save money twice with one purchase.** Pay no sales tax on Energy Star Appliances Feb. 18-20, 2012 and pay less money on energy over the life of the appliance. According to the State Comptrollers office, the following appliances are eligible for sales tax exemption: solar water heater, air conditioner, clothes washer or dryer, furnace, heat pump, standard size refrigerator, compact fluorescent light bulb, dehumidifier, boiler, or programmable thermostat that has been designated as meeting or exceeding the applicable Energy Star efficiency requirements developed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Department of Energy.