

Profile



Kim Baxter

Kim Baxter knows what's special about her partnership, **Rebuild Iowa**: "We're not another program that tells communities what to do. We ask what they want, and we help them get it done."

It's working so far. Rebuild Iowa welcomed its 200th building in March when the

Trinity Reformed Church joined the Rebuild Pella partnership. So far, 30 buildings have been retrofitted and partnerships statewide are saving more than \$590,000 a year in energy costs. One local partnership, Rebuild Webster City, won the 1998 Rebuild America Partnership of the Year award. As Development Unit Leader for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Baxter and her team develop, market and implement new and innovative energy-efficiency programs, including, in 1996, the Rebuild Iowa program. From the start, they followed an innovative formula – distributing U.S. Department of Energy grants to capable local partnerships and providing first-rate support and services.

Local Effort Yields Results

"Funded partnerships are selected competitively," Baxter says. "They must engage the entire community, which they show us through demonstrated financial and in-kind support, an active steering committee, and a wide variety of clients." This way, Baxter says, "they have a good foot to go from – a good part of the preliminary work is done

even before being selected as a partner.” Partnerships use the grant to hire a “local champion who has the respect of influential people and who can make things happen in their community.”

Baxter says the goal is for local partnerships to become sustainable and move out on their own after two years. **Webster City** was the first. The partnership built its \$50,000 grant into a program that has retrofitted more than 20 buildings and saved over \$450,000 annually. Now, one of the newest partnerships, the **City of Le Mars**, is focusing on the Westmar College campus, which the town recently acquired. Only a few buildings are in use, but the annual energy costs top \$300,000. The partnership is starting with a campus-wide analysis to explore ways to renovate and reuse the empty buildings.

Providing Solid Support

“We use Rebuild America as an umbrella for all of the programs and services we provide,” Baxter says, which include the Iowa Energy Bank, EnergySmart Schools, Energy Star Buildings and the Federal Energy Management Program. The Iowa DNR is also tied into the Iowa Department of Economic Development and recently proposed to interface with the Home Energy Rating Systems to enter the residential market.

She emphasizes that “People don’t care about the names of programs. They care about solutions. Our approach takes the guesswork out of it and gives communities a common point of entry. Programs become seamless.”

She notes that the action plan, timeline and checklist that Rebuild Iowa requires from every partnership helps communities to determine their priorities. That way Rebuild Iowa can serve as more than just a grantor – it can be a facilitator.

Rebuild Iowa provides a range of services, including:

- initial funding for a community coordinator until the program becomes sustainable
- training for local participants
- assistance with marketing and community education
- technical assistance with building improvements

The goal is to use local resources and expertise to encourage private-sector organizations to make cost-effective, energy-efficiency improvements.

Planning For Success

Baxter didn’t start out in the energy-efficiency sector. She earned a B.S. in Sociology from Iowa State and began working as an employment specialist/hearing officer in Iowa’s unemployment office. She also worked as a hazard planner for the state’s emergency management office of public defense prior to joining the Energy Bureau.

Planning, she says, is what she does best, whether for emergencies or developing programs for making buildings more energy efficient. When she’s not at work, Baxter enjoys spending time with family, friends, and her pets, including a Siberian Husky named Diamond.

Moving Forward

“Our next step is to finalize an assessment of how we can make Rebuild Iowa better,” Baxter says. “We realize that to be effective, we need to help people become agents of change in their own communities. Rebuild Iowa encompasses more than just energy efficiency. We’re trying to promote changes in attitudes, behaviors and lifestyles. For instance, if you install an energy-efficient system, but don’t properly operate and maintain it, the full extent of the energy savings will not be realized. We’ve been successful because we’ve created a vested interest in our clients. They’re apt to work harder when it’s their money on the line.”