

Kittitas PUD Offers Energy Assistance

Helping Hands and LIHEAP reach out to those needing financial assistance.

By Cris Ellingson

The Kittitas PUD Helping Hands program was created last year. During its first year, the fund helped 15 households, 22 individuals with \$4,500 in donations.

The program was formed through the generous donations of Kittitas PUD employees and customers, with the goal of providing financial help to elderly and disabled customers.

The elderly are especially vulnerable to cold temperatures, which increase the likelihood of their becoming seriously ill. This program helps those who, often on fixed incomes, may have to choose between their heating bill and other expenses.

This program year, it is hoped the fund can grow to \$15,000 or more, which would allow 50 families to be served-triple the initial year's efforts. Only 35 percent of last year's applications received assistance. The increased fund would allow more people to be helped.

Tax-deductible donations may be made by checking the box at the top of your billing statement and marking the method of payment, or by visiting the Kittitas PUD website at www.kittitaspud.com, clicking the "customer service" tab, then payment and billing tabs, then Helping Hands.

One of last year's Helping Hands recipients is lifelong resident Mary June Cobain.



Mary June Cobain, a Helping Hands recipient, in the Hope Source Ellensburg intake office.

Mary June is 84 years old and a fixed-income senior who was awarded \$95. She is the former owner and operator of Shamrock Janitorial Service, which she founded while cleaning work areas at the sheep plan where she worked.

Her employees were her sons, along with an occasional additional employee as needed.

Mary June and her late husband, Donald, were a hard-working couple, raising four boys in Kittitas County.

Donald was a 27-year Ellensburg mail carrier and

served as one of Gen. Douglas McArthur's Honor Guard when the United States granted the Philippines independence. He also enjoyed restoring automobiles. Mary June worked in town as a Safeway cashier and used to sing on the radio and at weddings.

Mary June lives in the house she and Donald build on 6 acres. With the help of relatives, neighbors and friends, she and her Jack Russell terrier, Scooter Rooter, continue to enjoy the abundant wildlife that comes by their country setting.

Mary June is a Kittitas County pioneer family descendent and is grateful the fund was able to assist her in meeting her heating needs last year. Living on approximately \$800 a month, the tax-deductible donation help her to financially survive the winter.

Helping hands, along with LIHEAP, are administered through HopeSource. Both programs benefit low-income Kittitas PUD customers.

The goal of LIHEAP, which stands for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, is to reduce winter-related illnesses, such as hypothermia. It also hopes to prevent the use of dangerous alternative heat such as charcoal grills and portable heaters.

LIHEAP is offered through the Washington State Department of Commerce. Part of the program's criteria is that recipients attend a workshop. Workshops include money management, developing positive work habits, understanding credit and debt, organization and time management, and energy conservation.

HopeSource Energy Coordinator Lisa Strohl says one of her wishes-which she is happy to report is being implemented in this year's Kittitas PUD Helping Hands program-is for the eligibility criteria expansion to deduct medical expenses from seniors' incomes when qualifying for assistance.

"This allows more seniors needing assistance to be eligible" she says.



Andrew Lyons, senior manager with HopeSource Home Performance & Energy Assistance, has worked in the public service sector most of his life, including as director at Hospice Friends in Ellensburg.

Andrew says he enjoys spending 45 minutes to an hour with people who share their often-vulnerable information as well as a fascinating view into their lives.

"It's an honor and privilege to spend that time and get to know someone, additionally even more rewarding if we can help someone's life in a way," he says.

Andrew hopes to expand those who can be included in the Helping Hands fund.

"If the funds can grow we can include even ore truly needy and vulnerable populations in the program," he says.

Assistance Criteria

The criteria to qualify for assistance include:

-Currently a PUD customer (account must be in the name of a current household resident).

-A household member must be 60 years or older.

-Household income meets income guidelines of the program, which are in the chart below.

-Has not received PUD Helping Hands award during the current program year (October 1 through September 30).

2014-2015 Program Monthly Income Eligibility		
Household Size	LiHeap	PUD Helping Hands
1	\$1,216	\$1,459
2	\$1,639	\$1,966
3	\$2,062	\$2,463
4	\$2,484	\$2,733
5	\$2,907	\$2,954
6	\$3,330	\$3,330
7	\$3,753	\$3,753
8	\$4,176	\$4,176
9	\$4,599	\$4,599
10	\$5,022	\$5,022
11	\$5,445	\$5,445
12	\$5,868	\$5,868
13	\$6,291	\$6,291
14	\$6,714	\$6,714