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Westchester Power begins consumer education campaign

Westchester Power, a community-based bulk energy purchasing program designed to increase the use of renewable energy and lower costs throughout Westchester County, has announced the launch of a consumer education campaign to help residents and municipal leaders understand and take advantage of new energy options enabled by this initiative.

The campaign, "emPowering Green Energy," aims to promote Westchester Power's mission of creating stable energy prices for consumers and building a stable platform for transition to sustainable local energy for municipalities and their residents.

Founded in May 2016, Westchester Power is New York's first Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) program. The CCA leverages the buying power of its large customer base to secure competitive fixed rates and renewable energy products for customers in participating municipalities. Westchester Power is one of a number of programs provided to the 41 in-county cities, towns and villages that comprise Sustainable Westchester, a non-profit 501(c)(3) membership organization that "seeks to turn environmental challenges into community-benefitting opportunities," according to spokesperson John Ewen.

Since the program's inception 11 months ago, Westchester Power has provided power to approximately 110,000 county residents and small businesses across 20 municipalities, saving residents over \$1.5 million.

"CCA is a brand new concept in New York... the public is overwhelmed with offers from ESCOs (Energy Service Companies), some not as transparent as they seem," said Westchester Power Program Director Dan Welsh. "Our objective in launching this campaign is to educate the Westchester consumer on who we are, what we do and the role the CCA can play in creating positive, local economic activity and achieving environmental goals."

Under the CCA format, Westchester Power becomes the default energy provider for consumers and small business owners in a participating municipality. While energy delivery, line maintenance and billing remain the responsibility of the state-designated utilities—Con Edison and New York State Electric and Gas Corp. (NYSEG)—Westchester Power acts on behalf of the communities to procure energy at the most attractive rates and conditions, allowing consumers to utilize an open market without having to sort through an array of offers alone.

In addition to standard (or "basic") energy supply, Westchester Power also offers customers option to "opt-up" for a 100% renewable energy supply. "When people hear, right from the start, that we have 14 of 20 participating (municipalities) opting for the 100% renewable supply, they are inspired by this leap forward," Mr. Welsh said. "This is leverage to drive Westchester Power and Sustainable Westchester's combined goal of increasing the county's quality of life through green power. We're looking to get all 41 Sustainable Westchester municipalities signed on in the next contract round."

The simple process of switching to green energy through Westchester Power has been met with approval from customers and municipality officials alike, according to Mr. Ewen.

In this area, Ossining town and

village are among the 20 participating municipalities and 14 of the 20 which opted for renewable power. The Town of Cortlandt and villages of Buchanan, Briarcliff Manor and Croton-on-Hudson chose not to participate in the program.

Reasons for municipalities' officials deciding not to participate included no assurance that customers would save money and the automatic process for customers being assigned to Westchester Power—and having to specifically "opt out" if they did not want to participate.

"Here in Ossining, we know that it is critical for us to do our part to combat climate change," said Dana Levenberg, Town of Ossining supervisor. "As greenhouse gases continue to threaten the well-being of our planet, we are pleased that the Westchester Power CCA has offered us a way to take effective, local action—it has given Westchester residents a significant path forward to go green easily and affordably."

"I'm happy that Lewisboro has teamed up with neighboring towns to create this program. It makes me feel like we're all pulling together, and that's more and more important these days," said Town of Lewisboro resident Elizabeth Meyer Gross. "I called the office in Mount Kisco and the staff there helped me switch from our default standard supply to the 100% renewable. It was nice to know that they are local as opposed to an automated line or remote call center who doesn't know what I, as a Lewisboro resident, am talking about."

As part of the consumer education program, Westchester Power plans to continue setting up meetings with municipal boards, local sustainability committees and environmental groups, as well as host consumer-based workshops and lectures. Westchester Power representatives will also be participating at local town events, library presentations and school-based programs to get residents aware at an early age about the importance of sustainable energy and its impact on the environment.

For more information about Westchester Power, visit <http://www.westchesterpower.org/>.