

New EECO Center Off to Slow Start

By Carolyn Ristau *The Bulletin*

East Liberty/Larimer – The Environment and Energy Community Outreach (EECO) Center officially opened on April 1, and a ribbon-cutting ceremony led by state Sen. Jim Ferlo, who spearheaded the creation of the center, was held June 21. But despite the official opening, the center is still getting itself organized.

The EECO Center, located at the corner of East Liberty Boulevard and Larimer Avenue, replaced a vacant gas station with a new, green, modular construction. The center is staffed and run by Pittsburgh Community Service Inc. (PCSI), an organization that connects individuals, families and communities with resources to improve quality of life.

A brochure describes the EECO Center as a “one-stop shop for energy conservation and community engagement.” Only a few of the programs envisioned for the center are currently offered, however. The Neighborhood Safety Program offers products and services including water- and energy-efficient Eco-Kits for low-income families. The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Dollar Energy Fund assist low-income families with their utility bills and supplies. Green Talk Tuesdays, open forums about green practices for businesses and business planning, are open to everyone.

Visitors of all income levels are welcome to drop by the center for information about energy efficiency and about resources available around the city. The scheduled hours for the EECO Center are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. Annette Condeluci, planning and grants management specialist for PCSI, said, “The goal is to

get more hours, particularly evening hours.”

However, *The Bulletin* staff visited the center on four different occasions during the stated hours and the doors were always locked. Sierra Laventure-Voltz, who started as program specialist for the EECO Center in early July, explained this was due to several factors, including plumbing that needed to be repaired and difficulty coordinating the staff’s summer schedules, as two staff members have to be on-site for the center to be open.

Laventure-Voltz and Condeluci described several potential future projects and programs for the EECO Center. The two closest to fruition are a rain garden, designed by The Penn State Center and managed by the Urban Redevelopment Authority, and a porous pavement exhibit. Laventure-Voltz said that the pavement exhibit will be “like a walk-through garden showcasing different porous materials with information and examples of each. It will have an outdoor classroom feel.”

Condeluci said she hopes the center can become a rental facility for community groups. She noted that the building is small, though, and at best can fit “20 people theater-style with no tables.” She said that opening the doors to community groups will help the EECO Center toward its long-term goal to “become part of the community.”

Information about the EECO Center and its programs will eventually be available through PCSI’s website, www.pghcsi.org. Laventure-Voltz said she thought this would be up and running this month. In the meantime, the center can be contacted at 412-661-0576 or through PCSI at 412-904-4700. ♦



ABOVE: The EECO Center stands on the site of a former gas station at the intersection of East Liberty Boulevard and Larimer Avenue. Photo by Paula Martinac



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