

Nick Romeo, Touchstone Energy Home Builder

What goes into the basic structure of a home makes all the difference when building an energy efficient home, said Nick Romeo, a Touchstone Energy Home builder who set the bar on energy efficient homes in the state of Indiana, achieving a 29 HERS Index rating on two homes – the lowest ever in the state.

The Home Energy Rating System (HERS) Index is the nationally recognized scoring system for measuring a home's energy performance. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, most resale homes score about a 130 on the scale and most new homes score 100.

"When a homeowner comes to me and asks about energy efficiency, I tell them go after the box first. Start with the envelope," Romeo said. He's a huge fan of foam insulation, but also advises customers that a little elbow grease goes a long way in getting a house as tight as possible. Caulk the plates, spray foam behind exterior outlets – all the basics really help, he said.

He became interested in the Touchstone Energy Home Program after attending a cooperative seminar on energy efficiency. Now his homes – regardless of size or price range – meet or exceed Touchstone standards. "Everything about a Touchstone home has an acceptable payback. I can take you to a 29 HERS score and tell you it's worth it."

Marketing Rebates for 2016

Jeremy Spillman with Direct Technology, now known as ESG, unveiled a new collaboration platform that will help co-ops manage their energy efficiency programs. Training on the secure, web-based program begins in October. For more information visit <http://www.directapps.com/Utilities/EECP.aspx>

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Economic Development

Three panelists – Thayr Richey of the Strategic Development Group, Carol Rogers of the Indiana Business Research Center and Chris Blunk of Hoosier Energy's Human Resources department – provided an overview of job trends in southern Indiana.

Qualified candidates are increasingly hard to find – a persistent problem since the recession ended in 2011, with skilled trades the hardest jobs to fill, Richey said.

An aging workforce contributes to the problem, but small, multi-county work-

force development programs can help turn the tide. Programs such as lineman training school, two-year manufacturing certifications and partnering with local high schools can give areas a leg up on attracting younger workers. "Droves of young folks are going to lineman training school boot camp. When they apply for a job at an electric company, it's like having an apprentice on silver platter," Blunk noted.

Solar Install Panel

Panelists from Whitewater Valley REMC, RushShelby Energy, Utilities District of Western Indiana and Daviess-Martin REMC provided an overview of two solar installation events celebrating the solar arrays that Hoosier Energy is installing across its 18-member system. Planning and execution for the events drew positive media coverage and reflected well on the communities, the panelists said.

Solar Commercial Installations

John Jackson, Vice President of Inovateus, solar panel installer for the Hoosier Energy program, said interest in solar is rising, with the focus on affordability. "Demand will be growing, but solar is not for everyone. The investment has to make sense. In this case, Hoosier Energy is a trailblazer."

Heat Pump 101: Calculating SEER Savings

Understanding how an air conditioner works helps anyone know how to calculate SEER savings, said William Fenton Jr., chairman of Ivy Tech Community College's HVAC and Energy Technology program. The concept is simple. The lower the pressure of a substance, the lower its temperature.

SEER, or seasonal energy efficiency