

Energy audits can help improve home efficiency

By MAIA FOX

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For June Chernutan of White, an energy audit on her house helped improve its energy efficiency and had an added benefit — it helped improve her health.

Chernutan had a cough for more than a year that would not go away and suspected it might have something to do with her house. So, she and her husband Paul contacted Outside the Box Home Solutions in White. As a Home Performance with Energy Star-accredited contractor, the construction company provides home energy audits using a system and equipment by Energy Star.

An assessment revealed that water had leaked into the duct system, causing fiber board to deteriorate.

“Through our ... process and the detail that is required by Energy Star for us to do these assessments, we were able to find out what that was and we fixed her duct system,” said Don Liotta, owner of Outside the Box.

“I’m doing much better,” Chernutan said. “I don’t cough like that now.”

In addition, she said the heating and cooling system in her home works better than before.

“Our AC was more efficient this summer,” she said. “And our heat, I can just set it on one level and I haven’t felt like I had to go turn it up again or turn it down.”

“We just did the major thing [replacing the main duct],” she added. “There’s still a few small things that we need to do like replacing the fan in the attic.”

Liotta said replacing the fan in the attic or covering it up during the winter is one of the easiest ways to keep heat from escaping.

He also recommended checking attic stairs, because usually they are not insulated or sealed and heat escapes through that as well.

People should also be on the lookout for dust accumulation on vents, Liotta said.

“If they get heavy build-up of dust on their vents, that means they’ve got air leakage somewhere in their system from either the attic space or crawl space,” he said.

When it comes to energy audits, Liotta said generally windows fall lowest on the fix-it list

because the purpose of the audit is to get the biggest bang for the buck.

“Duct leakage is a big thing,” he said. “My goal for the customer is to save as much money as I can on [their] utilities.”

Liotta encourages people to e-mail him with questions about energy audits at don@outsidetheboxconstruction.com.

For those who meet income requirements, Tallatoona Community Action Partnerships Inc. provides free energy audits to six counties, including Bartow.

Weatherization coordinator Winfred Popham said there is a waiting list but those interested should still contact them to see if they are eligible to participate.

“We stay busy year-round,” he said.

To contact Bartow’s Tallatoona office, call 770-382-5388.

The Cartersville Electric System offers a free energy audit for residential, commercial and industrial customers.

“We conduct more industrial and commercial audits each year than we do residential audits,” said Tamara Wilkins, Key Accounts manager. “As of yet, we have not seen a large demand for residential audits.”

Wilkins recommends that to save energy homeowners should:

- Set thermostats to 68 degrees in the winter and 78 degrees in the summer. You can also install a programmable thermostat.

- Check your insulation — R-30 insulation is recommended for the attic.

- Use storm windows or double-paned replacement windows. This helps reduce heat loss in the winter and heat gain in the summer.

- Seal ductwork and check for gaps or leaks. You can fix them yourself or have a professional fix them.

- Get your heating and cooling systems serviced at least once a year.

- Change your filters once a month.

- Wrap electric water heaters with an insulated blanket. You can find these at your local home improvement store.

- Check caulk and weather stripping around doors and windows.

To contact Cartersville Electric System, call 770-387-5631.