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## Thompson House awarded \$300,000 grant

By JAIME CONE / Reformer Staff

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BRATTLEBORO-- Thompson House residential nursing facility recently received a USDA loan of more than \$300,000 for the installation of a modern cooling and ventilation system.

In observation of Earth Day, the United States Department of Agriculture announced April 22 that a \$331,000 Community Facility Loan and a \$27,300 Community Facility Grant will be awarded to Brattleboro Mutual Aid Association, Inc., the owner of the Thompson House.

The new cooling and ventilation system will decrease energy consumption, allowing the Thompson House to save money while enhancing the comfort of its residents, according to a press release issued by the USDA.

The rooms of Thompson House's 60 residents are currently cooled with residential-style window air conditioners. Previous Central Vermont Public Service audits have indicated that the electrical drain on the facility was too great; health and safety concerns, plus the lack of light in residents' rooms, made it clear that a solution was needed, the release states.

Dane Rank, administrator for Thompson House, said the new system should help allow the residents -- and the 79 employees -- to be healthier and more comfortable in Thompson House, which was built in 1956.

"It was very hot in the summertime, so we've been using window air conditioning units for the rooms, but they take up half sunlight and completely block the view for people in beds and wheelchairs," Rank explained.

He said getting rid of the old window units will not only increase the amount of light coming in but improve the residents' respiratory health and save the Thompson House \$2,500 to \$5,000 each month in the cost of electricity and oil.

According to Rank, during the hottest parts of summer the Thompson House was shelling out \$7,000 to \$8,000 each month to power its air conditioners.

Because of the energy savings involved, the Thompson House is one of 53 projects across the United States being highlighted by USDA Rural Development in honor of Earth Day.

"As part of today's announcement, the USDA Rural Development is providing more than \$105 million to fund water and wastewater and community facilities projects across the nation," the release states.

"Forty-one years ago, a small group of dedicated citizens decided to take action to make their local communities cleaner and healthier, and from this spirit, Earth Day was born," said Molly Lambert, state director of USDA Rural Development.

"This essential improvement to the heating and cooling system at the Thompson House is a perfect example of the clean and efficient use of energy making a positive impact on the lives of our community members," Lambert said.

It's expected that the installation of the new system will cost \$490,000, with the first of three phases costing approximately \$150,000, according to Rank.

He said the Thompson House has been fundraising for the project for several years but has yet to raise the full amount, and the large loan will allow construction to begin this summer.

"It will be difficult to shoulder the loan over the long-term, but we've been getting contributions and holding fundraisers for it," Rank said. "We will start (the project), hopefully, in June and have it done by next year, rather than have it done bit by bit."

Vermont engineer John Penny, of John F. Penny Consulting services, is designing the new cooling and ventilation system. Rank said it's important to the Brattleboro Mutual Aid Association and the Thompson House to hire locally whenever possible.

"The project will be bid to local businesses as well," Rank said. "We've always taken special consideration to shop and bank and spend in Brattleboro and the surrounding area, and this continues that tradition of supporting our community."

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