

Bright ideas to save money! ^{RJ} 16/11/05

A SMALL corner of Ross-shire could find itself leading the way in reducing the region's fuel poverty if a year-long energy project launched this week proves a powerful success.

With one eye on their wallets and another on their carbon footprint, West Alness residents are hoping hundreds of households in the area will be able to reduce their energy bills by five per cent in the next year.

At a cost of £43,000, and a bonus payment of £10,000 to be spent in the community if the target is reached, the incentive to switch off lights and check the television isn't left on stand-by has never been greater.

The launch of the West Alness SAVE (Save And Value Energy) project came in the same week as West Alness Residents' Association was named runner-up in the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF) awards due to be presented at a ceremony in Glasgow next month. It will be a busy December for the association, for the day before the central belt ceremony members are due to travel to London, where it is expected they will walk away with yet another prize at the National Energy Efficiency Awards. Exactly what position they have clinched in that ceremony will remain under wraps until the big day.



● Jennifer Macleod (front), WASP Chairperson, with Mary Souter (left) representing Highland Council Housing and Property Services, Helen Houston (back second from left) representing Alness Initiative, and Russell Ogg (right) representing Scottish Hydro Electric, pictured during the project launch at Westend Community Centre in Alness. Picture: Derek Gordon

The group was nominated following the regeneration of the local community centre. As part of the overhaul, the hall now includes ground source heating which it is hoped will go towards reducing the running costs of the building.

According to official statistics the percentage of people living in fuel poverty in the region continues to be above the national average. In 2005, 21 per cent of households

in Highland Council suffered fuel poverty compared to the Scottish average of just 13 per cent. Experts at this week's SAVE launch in the Westend Community Centre believe the situation remains the same today.

Speaking at the launch, energy advisor Brid McKibben, who was on hand to visit householders and give them tips on how to start saving their cash, said, "The Scottish Highlands has a higher percentage of fuel

poverty than anywhere else in the country. Already people here are starting to think about their energy consumption, not least because of the awards this hall has won."

The SAVE project, being funded by Scottish Hydro Electric, is a partnership between resident groups in West Alness, Firhill, Kirkside, Coulpark and Westford as well as Alness Initiative and Highland Council.

For those who attended

Monday's launch the irony of an energy company financing such a power and money-saving project was not lost.

Speaking at the opening ceremony Russell Ogg, Scottish Hydro Electric's efficiency team manager, said, "The irony may be plain to see but there are a number of reasons why things can't carry on as they are at the moment and the carbon footprint is not the least of them."