

# in the Loop

## ENERGY STAR® Performers: Customers earn high marks for energy efficiency

*The following is an edited excerpt of an article that appeared in the Second Quarter 2009 District Energy magazine, the quarterly publication of the International District Energy Association. The full article is available as a pdf at <http://tinyurl.com/energystararticle>.*

Businesses are buzzing about ENERGY STAR. Whether they're retrofitting existing office space or designing a new structure, companies are seeking the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) ENERGY STAR label, the national symbol of energy efficiency. Why? Because it is helping building owners and managers measure – and reduce – their facilities' energy consumption. And that is good news for the bottom line and the environment.

Keith Oldham from State House Square, a Hartford Steam Co. customer, explains: "ENERGY STAR is a simple and easy way to track a building's energy usage without spending a great deal of time or money...I recommend that all facility managers and/or chief engineers at least take a look at this program. At a minimum, you will have a comfort level that your facility is performing as well, if not better, than similar buildings throughout the country."

State House Square has earned the ENERGY STAR label five years in a row.

### Behind the Buzz

In the United States, an increasing number of buildings are taking measures to save energy and money and lessen their environmental impact. In 2008, more than 3,300 commercial buildings and manufacturing plants in the United States earned the ENERGY STAR, representing savings of more than \$1 billion in utility bills and more than 7 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

In a number of cities, district energy systems serve a majority of the ENERGY STAR-qualified buildings in their service areas. In Hartford, for example, Hartford Steam counts six out of seven ENERGY STAR buildings in its market as customers.

### Hartford Steam's Shining ENERGY STARS

**280 Trumbull Street**

**Year ENERGY STAR-labeled (rating): 2008 (91)**



Courtesy Grunberg Management.

#### Other ENERGY STAR buildings served by Hartford Steam Co. (years labeled):

- Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (2005)
- Travelers (2006-2008)
- One State Street (1999, 2002, 2006, 2008)
- Phoenix Life Insurance Co. (2007)
- State House Square (2004-2008)

## Why ENERGY STAR?

The EPA and the U.S. Department of Energy created the ENERGY STAR program for commercial buildings and plants to help businesses save money and protect the environment. One study found that ENERGY STAR buildings use an average of almost 40 percent less energy than average non-ENERGY STAR buildings and emit 35 percent less carbon. Another recent study showed that rental rates in ENERGY STAR buildings have a \$2.38-per-sq-ft premium over their non-ENERGY STAR peers and 3.6 percent higher occupancy; in addition, they sell for \$61 more per square foot on average.

These factors are behind many district energy customers' decisions to go for the label. The facilities [group] of the Phoenix Life Insurance Co. building, a Hartford Steam customer, pursued the ENERGY STAR label to demonstrate to senior management that it was operating effectively. Some property owners make achieving ENERGY STAR status a portfolio-wide project – in some cases as part of a commitment to obtaining certification in the LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) or Green Globes™ green building rating systems. ENERGY STAR is also

**ENERGY STAR buildings use almost 40 percent less energy and sell for \$61 more per square foot on average.**



**State House Square, a Hartford Steam customer, first earned the ENERGY STAR in 2004 as part of a project launched by the building owners to track and compare energy usage among similar properties in their portfolio.**

on the radar screen of many building owners because some state and local governments reference ENERGY STAR benchmarking tools or standards in legislation and ordinances.

Buildings old and new participate in the ENERGY STAR program, as well as plants and commercial buildings used for a variety of purposes. Seattle's historic Skinner Building is an interesting and historic case in point: It houses offices, retailers and the acclaimed 5th Avenue Theatre, a tenant dating to the building's opening in 1926. The Seattle Steam Co. customer earned the ENERGY STAR in 2008.

## How They Did It

To earn the ENERGY STAR, building owners or managers must benchmark their energy consumption in the program's online Portfolio Manager tool, which rates building energy efficiency on a scale of 1-100 as compared to similar buildings nationwide. Buildings scoring 75 or higher and that have been professionally verified to meet current indoor environmental standards are eligible to apply for the ENERGY STAR rating.

By most accounts, the application process is straightforward. Grunberg Management, which manages the 280 Trumbull St. building, another Hartford steam customer, required less than 10 hours to compile, review and run historical energy use data through Portfolio Manager and ready it for verification – mainly because of excellent recordkeeping.

If buildings have focused on continuously improving energy efficiency, they often immediately meet the ENERGY STAR criteria. The 280 Trumbull St. building easily achieved the ENERGY STAR the first time it engaged in the process. Rather than repairing old technologies, its owner consistently replaces old failing equipment with newer, more efficient technologies. This approach, as opposed to embarking on upgrades solely to achieve the ENERGY STAR label, makes improvement costs more manageable.

Many facilities earn the ENERGY STAR rating with a solid combination of existing features and retrofit projects. Even newer buildings that were designed with energy efficiency in mind embark on improvements to help earn the label.

Both new and existing buildings may find that being supplied with district energy gives them an advantage

when it comes to qualifying for the ENERGY STAR rating, as the benchmarking process recognizes the value of district steam in supporting greater energy efficiency. Seattle's Skinner Building, for example, found that its connection to Seattle Steam helped it score a higher number of points than would have been possible using electric heating. The building's property manager observes, "We truly don't believe we would have received ENERGY STAR certification without our connection to Seattle Steam and district energy."

### The Payback

So are the time and expense spent pursuing ENERGY STAR certification worth it to district energy customers? Grunberg Management thinks so. Its 280 Trumbull St. building spent less than \$2,000 on the certification process, with most of the cost going toward hiring the required ENERGY STAR-approved engineer to perform a site visit and validate all submitted data.

While the expenses incurred in the certification process itself are minimal, the costs of attaining the energy efficiency level needed to qualify for ENERGY STAR also provide a good return on investment. State House Square saw payback on a 2007 garage lighting upgrade in less than two years, with a 47 percent rebate obtained from Connecticut Light & Power.

In Minneapolis, the 1.2-million-sq-ft Ameriprise Client Service Center decreased its electrical consumption by 8 percent with the energy efficiency investments it made on the path to earning the ENERGY STAR. The building, an NRG Energy Center Minneapolis customer, was also able to reduce district heating use by more than 25 percent. These reductions saved Ameriprise Financial more than \$125,000 in utility costs while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition to the more direct bottom-line benefits of achieving the ENERGY STAR, building owners and managers can also derive marketing value from the label. They receive an ENERGY STAR plaque to display as a symbol of their commitment to environmental responsibility and can partner with the EPA on press releases and other media activities.

As more and more district energy customers seek to cut operating costs and lower carbon emissions, district energy companies like Hartford Steam will help by continuing to offer energy efficiency recommendations – and by directing customers to the ENERGY STAR program.

ENERGY STAR benchmarking and certification is a smart first step building operators can take, and inexpensively, to begin to understand where their buildings may be operating well or inefficiently as compared to other similar buildings. For as one district energy customer recently noted, "Energy is money...it's my job to save it."



## Hartford Native Grows With Company

Debbie Levitsky loves accounting. And she's happy with her job at Hartford Steam. The result is a perfect match, as Levitsky is Hartford Steam's accounting supervisor and has been with the company since 2001.



**Debbie Levitsky is Hartford Steam Co.'s accounting supervisor.**

Although she previously worked at Connecticut Natural Gas and in the banking industry, she enjoys her current job and responsibilities. She processes customer invoices; handles journal entries, month-end close and special projects; oversees payroll; and interacts with customers to answer questions and provide additional information. She is also an accounting supervisor.

"Even though I've been with the company for eight years, I'm continuing to learn new things, take on more responsibility and grow in my profession," says Levitsky. "Right now we're going through a general ledger system conversion, and even though that's a major project, I find it interesting and can see the benefits that will result. We're always looking to further improve processes and efficiencies."

Until recently, Levitsky was working full time and going to school part time, so her days were extremely full. But now that classes have been completed, her schedule has opened up a bit, and she's more able to be with her husband and son and cheering on their favorite sports teams – the Red Sox and UConn.

Levitsky is a native of Hartford, born right in St. Francis Hospital, and she's lived in Connecticut all of her life. Right now she and her family are Middletown residents, which makes commuting a breeze.

Thanks, Debbie, for your work on the conversion and continuing to do a great job for us at Hartford Steam.



## Check it out.

The International District Energy Association debuted a new district energy industry video at its 100th Annual Conference at the end of June.

We encourage you to take a look:

[www.hartfordsteam.com/resources.htm](http://www.hartfordsteam.com/resources.htm)

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