

Published Tuesday, November 19, 2002

New store aims to raise conservation consciousness

By Amy Rekeweg

FORT WAYNE – Most people go about their daily lives with little thought of their energy consumption. Once a month when their electric and heating bills arrive, they moan and groan and pay for it, both financially and environmentally.

Introducing a store that puts all of its energy into helping you conserve yours.

The Energy Alternative, "America's 21st Century Store," hosted its grand-opening celebration November 18 through 30. The store, located at 101 W. Washington Center Road, is now open six days per week, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Energy Alternative is the first business of its kind in the Fort Wayne area to offer a wide variety of innovative and energy-saving products exclusively under one roof.

"We believe the time has come for a greater degree of energy independence in today's marketplace, and we are the first such store to offer energy products in an environment that is informative and easy to understand," says Steve Di Renzo, president of The Energy Alternative.

The exciting business venture formed from discussions between Di Renzo and his brother-in-law, Michael Westrick, chief executive officer. The pair filled key management positions with Christian men who, like them, are committed to raising a new level of consciousness among consumers about the power we are using and the power we are wasting.

"As Americans, we enjoy relatively inexpensive, abundant sources of energy for our homes, schools, and businesses," says Don Westrick, vice president of procurement. "But, we should all be conscious of our planet's finite natural resources. You, your children, your children's children, and all future generations will live in a better world if we make the right energy decisions today."

The Energy Alternative's strength is giving people access to exciting products proven to reduce energy bills and accompanying pollution - products that are typically difficult to find through conventional distributors and retailers.

"We are a brick and mortar store and an e-commerce entity for energy efficient products for your home and small business," Don explains. "We've collected from all over the world products that last longer, work better, and use less power than most products Americans choose to use every day.

"I think the American consumer is going to be amazed at what they find here. We have alternatives for all the energy users in your home."

The Energy Alternative team is particularly proud of its vast inventory of compact fluorescent light bulbs, or CFLs. They hope to capture a large portion of the CFL market by being the first to thoroughly educate consumers about the benefits of these products over traditional incandescent light bulbs.

"We have, perhaps, the nation's broadest selection of compact fluorescent light bulbs," says Don. "We can replace just about any incandescent in a home with a light bulb that gives off just as much light but lasts as long as 10 incandescent light bulbs and uses one-quarter as much energy."

Plus, with compact fluorescent, consumers can choose a light color and wavelength to suit specific applications or to enhance the ambience of any room, Don adds.

But CFLs aren't the only products turning heads. Consumers will want to check out The Energy Alternative's collection of user-friendly controls that balance heating, cooling and lighting while adding comfort and lowering energy costs. And then, of course, there are aisles full of lighting fixtures, lamps, night lights, flashlights, natural light fixtures, power generators, surge suppressors, energy measurement devices, and a smorgasbord of solar-powered products - from the familiar walkway lights to house signs to water fountains. The Energy Alternative is also the place to find unique gifts, toys and gadgets that are just plain fun.

"If it works better, lasts longer, saves energy and money - and could incidentally be very cool, too - The Energy Alternative has it and offers it in an environment where customers can ask questions and get all the right answers from 'The Energy Experts,'" says Sam Horner, vice president of sales.

Just as big as its inventory is The Energy Alternative's plans for the future. In time the store will offer complete systems promoting renewable energy and sustainable living. It will also host seminars to help folks understand the ease of integrating energy-efficient devices into their lives. In addition, "we will research and make available the information for government and bank programs that offer incentives for energy investment for the homeowner," Di Renzo says.

The Energy Alternative team is excited about its potential to blossom in today's increasingly energy-conscious culture. Multiple retail outlets will open in the Fort Wayne area beginning the second quarter of 2003, and Di Renzo envisions 300 retail distribution stores opening across the country by 2008.

According to Tom Bowser, vice president of marketing, sales in the West Washington Center Road store have been great so far, and the staff is optimistic that traffic will pick up, especially with an intense marketing effort planned over the holiday season. Advertisements are currently being run in select local newspapers and publications. Consumers can also learn more about The Energy Alternative's products on the Web, through upcoming catalog sales, and through commercials airing on local radio stations and television networks such as TLC (The Learning Channel), HGTV (Home & Garden Television) and The Weather Channel.

"Our goal is to get the word out about the exciting things we have to offer," Bowser says. "The Energy Alternative provides common products made with uncommon technology - a store for modern common sense."