



PARK CITY MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY NEWS INTERVIEW

SUMMIT COMMUNITY POWER WORKS EMPOWERS RESIDENTS TO SAVE MONEY & ENERGY

AN INTERVIEW WITH MATT ABBOTT & MARY CHRISTA SMITH

Summit Community Power Works (SCPW) is a Park City Community Foundation Project that was established to help the county adopt energy-efficiency measures and renewable sources. SCPW is helping Summit County compete in the \$5-million Georgetown University Energy Prize.

Park City Municipal Corporation: How and why did you formulate Summit Community Power Works?

Matt Abbott: Strong sustainability programs need strong nonprofits. There is a lot of pent-up demand in the community to become more energy independent, so we are harnessing that demand and filling the gap of providing both non-partisan advocacy and practical tools and resources.

SCPW is the second incarnation of a program that was formerly called Summit Community Solar. We wanted to reconstitute the program in some form, and then we learned about the Georgetown University Energy Prize (GUEP), so we created a formalized entity to compete in that.

PCMC: Summit County is a large county with a disparate economy and diverse political views. What is your strategy for reaching out to your constituents?

MC: We started with the governments for the county's six cities. We have tremendous support from the six mayors, who helped neutralize the stereotypes associated with energy programs and communicated a positive message about independence. In the town of Kamas, especially, the program has become a great source of community pride.

PCMC: What role have the schools played?

MC: The three school districts—South Summit, North Summit, and Park City—have been integral to our success, and what is most encouraging is that the groundswell of support has come from the students, who, in turn, recruited their parents. We call it “pester power”: the kids learn about the program in school then educate their parents. Kerry Lambert, who just retired from South Summit after teaching for 35 years, sits on our board and helped developed a core-approved curriculum. The anchor element is an assembly that teaches students about where energy comes from (primarily coal-fired power plants) and then explains the differences between the three main kinds of light bulbs (laying out the pros and cons of each one). We rolled out this assembly then sent the students home with kits to share with their families.

PCMC: How successful have you been, by the numbers?

MC: South Summit took the lead and set a great example for the other school districts. They switched out 1400 bulbs in their own homes through our LED Switch program. North Summit followed suit and switched out 750 bulbs in the last week of school (despite the excitement of summer being right around the corner). Park City started with Jeremy Elementary and has switched a large number as well. And Park City Day School has switched 2300 bulbs in their homes.

“SAVING ENERGY
CAN BE AS EASY
AS CHANGING A
LIGHT BULB.”



PCMC: What about the message itself? What story are you telling?

MC: We keep it very simple: using education, facilitation, and market-based incentives, we empower individuals to be self-reliant. Reducing energy can be easy (as easy as changing a light bulb), and can improve home comfort. Folks also like that they can control costs, and there is an inherent motivation to pay the utilities less money. We also are very careful to communicate that this is not a government program: no one is being told what to do through regulation. We've found that the emotional calculus is more powerful than the sticker price. And we constantly test and retest our messaging and replicate what seems to resonate.

PCMC: Why did you start with LEDs?

MA: They are the simplest, easiest, most cost-effective way to have the greatest impact on energy-reduction. A typical energy-conservation program will generate about a 2.5-percent reduction, but GUEP wants substantially more than that. CFLs (compact fluorescent light bulbs) provide about an 11-percent reduction, and LEDs far outperform them, providing a 28-percent reduction on average.

PCMC: The GUEP is a great galvanizing force, in that it provides a deadline as well as a huge cash prize. How do the program's administrators even the playing field so that communities across the country can compete?

MA: The GUEP first normalizes weather and demographic data so that we all start on the same footing. The hard metric is each community's delta: the percent reduction of residential energy use. The prize then integrates four soft metrics: replication, scalability, innovation, and sustainability (or ability to extend the life of the program past the prize). We are especially excited about the soft metrics because we have structured our SCPW to be exactly this: a self-

perpetuating program that lasts far longer than the duration of the competition. And Utah is not a home-rule state, which means that municipal and county codes cannot be stricter than state law. For this reason, our programs are inherently more scalable if they are successful.

PCMC: The LED switch is the first tier of your program. What comes next?

MA: We've created a stair-step approach to energy efficiency. The next step people can take is the **Control Switch**, i.e., switching their home thermostats to smart thermostats such as the Nest brand. Next comes the **Comfort Switch**, which provides solutions for whole-home weatherization. And finally, the **Power Switch**, which helps families install renewables on or in their own homes.

PCMC: What has inspired you to be a part of this program?

MC: I moved to Park City in 1991, and have been living in Kamas since 2000. My heart is really in this program because I want to pour my energy into work that makes a difference. I want to leave a brighter legacy—both economically and environmentally. I have been



so grateful for the opportunity to meet people, and this process has reinforced my belief that people are genuinely good: they care about their communities. Our goal is to harness the enthusiasm and desire that already exist in the community. If we can share best practices with each other, we can go further, faster together. The power of the collective—consciousness brought into action—is what will win this prize.

PCMC: Thank you for empowering everyone in Summit County to have a brighter, clearer future.

For more information:

Summit Community Power Works: scpw.org

Georgetown University Energy Prize: guep.org

Nest: nest.com

