



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOCAL SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AGENCIES GET BOOST FROM HORIZON UTILITIES

February 8, 2011 – Individuals and families experiencing difficulties paying their energy bills can apply to receive assistance through the Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP), funded by Horizon Utilities Corporation and administered in Hamilton by the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton and in St. Catharines by the United Way of St. Catharines and District.

LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance is a comprehensive, year-round emergency financial assistance program developed by the Ontario Energy Board to assist low-income energy customers to better manage their bill payments and energy costs. The program was based on the “Winter Warmth” program and is intended to supplement existing government initiatives, such as the Emergency Energy Fund. Emergency financial assistance is funded through the distribution rate portion of the customer bill. LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance is a grant program intended to provide *emergency* relief to eligible low-income customers who may be experiencing difficulty paying current arrears. It is not intended to provide regular or ongoing bill payment assistance.

Horizon Utilities will contribute more than \$100,000 to the local agencies to support the Ontario Energy Board’s new LEAP program. These funds will provide much needed financial support to customers, allowing them to better manage their bill payments and energy costs while giving them some financial relief.

“Horizon Utilities supports the OEB program and believes it is important for us to build partnerships in the community and to support local organizations such as the United Way to assist people who are experiencing financial difficulties,” said Max Cananzi, President and CEO for Horizon Utilities. “Horizon’s business goal is to educate our customers to make better decisions related to energy use, and to assist them in managing rising electricity costs. The LEAP program supports this by providing financial assistance where it is most needed in our communities.”

Betty-Lou Souter, CEO of Community Care, St. Catharines and Thorold, added, “Sleeping in a warm bed each and every night is something that we as Canadians value and often take for granted. LEAP affords everyone that right. Thank you to Horizon for partnering with area service providers to ensure it happens!”

Len Lifchus, CEO of the United Way of Burlington & Greater Hamilton also expressed his appreciation for the program. “We are truly grateful to Horizon Utilities for helping United Way of Burlington & Greater Hamilton to ensure year-round emergency financial assistance is not an ideal but a reality for “Every One, Every Day, Every Way in Greater Hamilton”.

How the Fund Works

Families and individuals needing financial assistance to pay their heating and electricity bills can obtain information about the LEAP program and determine their eligibility at their nearest community agency participating in the program.

Horizon Utilities Corporation's Customer Service Department will also advise customers about the program, where applicable, and direct them to the appropriate agency.

After a successful application process, one-time funding will be credited directly to the applicant's utilities account.

Eligibility

Eligible grant recipients include low-income households who are in arrears or at risk of going into arrears on their energy bills and have exhausted all other sources of financial support.

Customers can contact the following agencies to determine funding eligibility and submit an application:

North Hamilton Community Health Centre

905-523-6611 ext. 3009

Community Care, St. Catharines & Thorold

905-685-1349

For further information:

United Way of Burlington & Greater Hamilton

Angela Dawe

Director of Community Investment & Agency Relations

905-527-4576, ext. 223

Community Care, St. Catharines & Thorold

Betty-Lou Souter

CEO

905-685-1349

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Tony Iavarone

Director, Corporate Communications

905-317-4707