DTE Energy Wins MEEA Innovation Award
Program Brings Energy Savings to Detroit's Independent Grocers

Chicago – DTE Energy's successful Independent Grocer's Incentive Program, which introduced energy efficient solutions to a hard-to-reach market segment, is the winner of this year's Inspiring Efficiency Innovation Award, from the Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (MEEA).

Detroit has no big footprint or chain grocery stores, and instead relies on a network of small, independent grocers to serve the city's residents. DTE's program to help these grocers reduce their energy costs and keep produce fresher dovetailed with the City's efforts to make more fresh foods available to its local residents.

As a market segment, Detroit's independent grocers also represented a high potential for energy savings. Their extended hours of operation, combined with energy-intensive equipment such as coolers and walk-in freezers, have traditionally made for high energy bills. Also, compared to big box competitors such as Walmart, independent grocers tend to have older, far less efficient equipment.

However, despite their potential for energy savings, Detroit's grocers had proved to be a hard-to-reach segment in previous energy efficiency initiatives. The need to engage grocers with their own custom program became clear when DTE discovered that not a single independent grocery store had participated in its existing Commercial and Industrial Incentive Program.

In order to develop a custom, easy-to-use program, DTE performed energy audits on three local independent grocery stores and then used their findings to develop a prescriptive à la carte program for use by all the area's grocers.

"We performed a deep dive and came up with some really interesting and useful information we would not have been able to obtain otherwise," said William Clemens, DTE Energy's Manager of Energy Efficiency & Business Services and the program's chief architect. "As a result, we were able to develop a completely prescriptive application for program participants. You fill out the application, enter in the equipment you're using, and it immediately provides your potential energy savings."

By all standards, the program was considered a resounding success. Typical energy savings per store increased by more than 18 percent, with an average of 107,000 Kilowatt

hours saved. Participation levels also reached 25 percent, exceeding the program's initial goal of 20 percent. The program was also able to make local businesses more financially stable by helping them save money on energy costs, and identify ways to keep foods fresher for customers.

In fact, the process for developing an energy optimization program for hard-to-reach markets was so successful that in the coming year DTE plans to extend similar programs to the lodging, healthcare and restaurant industries.

The award was accepted by DTE Energy Marketing Program Manager John Lobbia at MEEA's annual Midwest Energy Solutions Conference, www.meeaconference.org, on January 13 in Chicago.

"DTE's independent grocers program was truly groundbreaking," said MEEA Acting Executive Director Jay Wrobel. "It not only helped small businesses save money and cut energy use, but also helped to improve everyday life for Detroit residents."

Bestowed annually, MEEA's Innovation Award is presented to an organization or individual that developed and implemented a new innovative program, idea or policy in the Midwest.

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Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance, www.mwalliance.org, is a collaborative network advancing energy efficiency in the Midwest to support sustainable economic development and environmental preservation.

MEEA promotes the market transformation of energy efficiency technologies, processes and best practices within a 13-state area, through policy advocacy, program design and facilitation and piloting of energy technologies. MEEA bridges the gap between policy adoption and program implementation.