



## ENERGY PARTNERSHIPS ARE MIRACULOUS

### Eastern Sierra Energy Initiative to infuse communities with efficiency

By Rick Phelps

At the recent meeting of the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments, Southern California Edison announced the formation of the Eastern Sierra Energy Initiative – a local government partnership among the City of Bishop, the Town of Mammoth Lakes and Inyo and Mono counties. The goal of the Energy Initiative is to save 1.8 million kilowatt hours over the next three years and infuse the participating communities with the culture of energy efficiency and awareness.

These local government partnerships now seem like a natural extension of utility activities and each of the investor-owned utilities in California now have some form of partnerships. However, one man is responsible for this innovation: the late John Phillips of Laguna Beach. He had a vision for energy partnerships that is now reality and that vision represents a truly miraculous accomplishment.

John was a character. He was a 60-ish man who could wear bow ties with contrasting suspenders and Italian loafers with no socks ... and get away with it. His energy was boundless and he wouldn't take no for an answer. While sitting in his office with an open-air view of the beach, I often watched him pick up the phone and soon be talking with the CEO of one of the California utilities or a Public Utilities Commissioner. Undoubtedly, he was a good salesman (which he would never admit), but the reason he had the ears of CEOs and Commissioners was that he had a resonant message.

I had the honor of working with John during the 1990s when he first raised the idea that local governments and their serving utilities could work in concert to more rapidly roll out energy efficiency across the State of California. The utilities were not sure they needed his help and the regulators didn't know how utilities would work with local governments and didn't know who would pay for it.

In John's view, community energy partnerships would have at their core local control, elementary education,



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ties with the serving utility, local heat and power, and continuous innovation. Utilities and their customers would pay for this and John would provide the management. John thought this a bargain for the utilities, as they would obtain significant energy efficiency resources with minimal investment. The utilities and the state regulators saw the potential too, but with a lot more micro-management than John desired.

The first partnerships were in the Los Angeles and Orange County areas, but rapidly expanded eastward and north to the Bay Area. Partnerships now number 64 and include cities, counties, regional groups and joint power authorities throughout the State of California. Partnership forecasted savings for the 2010-2012 period is 454 million kilowatt hours or about \$70 million. If John Phillips were still around, I think he would be pleased, but disappointed the savings were not greater.

The first energy partnership in the High Sierra is the High Sierra Energy Initiative, which has focused on the Town of Mammoth Lakes since 2006. Energy savings were significant, but the main emphasis was on education and outreach. The Initiative worked with residents and businesses and managed a sixth grade energy efficiency/water conservation program for Mammoth Middle School. Additionally, the Initiative coordinated the installation of new lighting in over 40 businesses, several multifamily buildings and affordable housing units, and replaced thousands of incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps and exchanged over 1,000 strings of high-energy Christmas lights with efficient LEDs.

Building on the success of the Mammoth Lakes' partnership, the

Councils and Boards of Mammoth Lakes, Bishop and Inyo and Mono counties endorsed the idea of the Eastern Sierra Energy Initiative and the California Public Utilities Commission approved the expansion in September to start Jan. 1, 2010.

The goal of the Initiative is to increase energy efficiency, save money, and reduce emissions, including greenhouse gases. Local governments will be the leaders and demonstrate to the community the potential for increased efficiency and savings. Funding for the implementation in government facilities will come from stimulus funds and zero interest financing available in 2010 from Southern California Edison. The High Sierra Energy Foundation will coordinate the efforts between the local governments and Southern California Edison to ensure that the

goals of the Initiative are being met.

John, sitting somewhere in those loafers, would be pleased that most of his vision is reality. He would be very happy that we are working with the schools to promote the energy message, but a little disappointed that local heat and power (which we now call distributed generation) is still in the planning stages. He would say that it looked like the energy efficiency message was finally taking hold and then he would pick up the phone ...

*Rick Phelps is Executive Director of the High Sierra Energy Foundation. The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of his employer.*

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