

Owner explains how she applied for, received grant

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:07 -



Connie Lee bought a home in June of 2009 that needed new windows, siding, eaves, soffit and gutters.

Initially, Lee was able to overlook those shortcomings.

“When you are low income and trying to support yourself, there are things you can’t afford,” said Lee who lives at 1158 Ave. I. “

After reading an advertisement in The Times about Gothenburg’s owner-occupied housing rehabilitation program, Lee was skeptical.

“I didn’t think I’d qualify because I’m not over 65 years old,” said the 56-year-old transplant from Perkins County.

Although the program targets homeowners 62 years of age and older, West Central Nebraska Development District fiscal officer Ginger Featherngill said it’s not limited to that age.

Lee obtained an application packet from city hall and applied for funding.

She was turned down, Featherngill said, because she didn’t yet own the home.

During a second round of funding, Lee’s application was accepted.

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The next step was an inspection of her home by Featherngill, a rehabilitation specialist and a lead-based paint inspector.

Once a work write-up was completed, Lee sought and obtained bids from a list of contractors trained in lead-safe work practices.

Then, along with West Central officials, Lee selected a contractor and contracts were signed.

At a preconstruction meeting, more documents were signed so Lee could use an \$18,000 grant for home repairs.

There is no cost to a qualified homeowner if expenses don't exceed \$20,000.

Featherngill pointed to a 10-year occupancy requirement to be eligible for funds but said if the home sells, the owner pays back a percentage of the funds.

"The program is to improve living conditions rather than improve resale values," she said.

Two weeks ago, contractors began replacing siding and installing new windows on Lee's home.

They will also change the slope of her yard to prevent water from seeping into the crawl space. The homes's electrical system will also be upgraded.

Looking back, Lee said the hardest part of the process was getting contractors to submit bids because it's a lengthy document.

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But that's negligible when compared to what she gained.

Lee can't wait to see the new yellow siding with white trim.

"It's exciting because on the outside it will be brand new," she said.

Most importantly, Lee said it's her home.

"It's where I'm spreading my wings," she said. "I plan to be there until I can't live in my home anymore."

She added that she doesn't feel she's getting a government handout through the program.

"I work now and I've worked hard before," Lee said.

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