The Stanwood Energy Challenge pulls together 16 Stanwood businesses, in 2 teams of 8, in a competition to see which team can save the most energy. The Challenge began February 3 and runs five months, through June 2014. Each team is equipped with a real-time energy monitor, an energy assessment, and energy-saving ideas they can use right away. Snohomish PUD sponsors the Challenge; PECI coordinates it. This is the seventh of 16 participant profiles.

Profile: Ace Hardware
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Spokesman: Ken Walker

Why did your business decide to participate in the Stanwood Energy Challenge?
“We'd been doing everything we could to try to make energy efficiency work, to see if there were additional things we could do and to be part of the community, to take a leadership role in saving energy in the community.”

How are your employees responding to the program?
“They are a very competitive bunch. They check to see how we're doing against everybody else pretty much every day. Right now we're in 2nd place on our team, and we want to make it to #1.”

How closely do you look at your utility bills?
“Actually, my wife does that. She looks at them very closely. She has an accounting background and she was a banker so she scrutinizes everything.”
What are your biggest energy users in the store?

“The biggest consumption in this store is the HVAC. Behind that is lighting because of the amount of lighting we have and the square footage of sales floor. Those are the two biggest areas.”

What energy saving measures did you do before the Challenge started?

“Well, we thought we were managing our thermostats very nicely and very clearly. One of the things we learned from the survey is that we could do better at that. We established some timers for all of our lighted displays so they turn off at closing and come on when we open. Also, we were self-monitoring: somebody leaves the restroom, turn the lights off – things such as that.”

What have you learned so far? Any surprises?

“The biggest thing we learned is that not only do we have to monitor our thermostats to make sure that we have good gap and to make sure that the time on them is proper, but in our case, they are wireless, so we have to replace the batteries every 45 to 60 days. When the batteries go weak, they’re not communicating well with the rooftop units, and, consequently, they run at times when we don’t want them to run.”

What changes have you made so far or are planning for the future?

“A couple of things we’ll look at in the future are the possibility of some air curtains or air knives at the door both for comfort as well as for energy savings. We are also talking to both our landlord and SnoPUD about doing some upgrades, or at least some retrofits, to the rooftop units. We would split that with the owner, as far as energy savings from that.”

Any comments from customers or community about your participation in the Challenge?

“Not really, maybe some minor comments. We probably don’t do as good a job talking it up as we should. It has been much more of an internal competition for us. We could, and should, do a better job promoting it to the community. We talk to a lot to folks about lighting these days and understanding the new lighting and understanding what we can do to help save energy and still achieve the same goal.”

Any energy saving advice for other businesses in the community that may not be part of the Energy Challenge?

“The #1 energy savings that I can say is monitor your thermostats. Make sure you have a great gap between the heat and cool setting. If you’re using wireless, make sure you keep the batteries fresh. In fact, we put it on our
monthly checklist to check those. I was doing it ‘catch as catch can,’ so to speak.

“We’ve challenged ourselves to see how low we can take it because in the winter months we want it to be com-
fortable for folks when they’re wearing their coats, but we also want it to be comfortable for the employees. And,
in the summer months we once again want it to be comfortable for the folks who come in here, but still not freez-
ing for the employees. So it’s a balance. That’s the one largest area.

“Another one is that when we close the store, we do turn off half our lights and then go through our closing pro-
dure. We’re still self-monitoring: leave the break room, turn the lights out; leave the restroom, turn the lights out;
and, leave the office, turn the lights out. We are pretty good at that. If you’re not, then get an occupancy sensor.”

We like the Energy Challenge because ….

“…it still creates excitement for our folks and promotes a team effort. ‘What can we do? And how can we watch
what’s going on and how other businesses are doing?’

We have a competitive group. They don’t like being #2. They’re trying to figure out how we can do a better job to
get to the top!”