



This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **The Journal News**.
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

See the light

(Original Publication: December 22, 2006)

A developer's holiday gift to tenants in a White Plains low-income apartment building reminds us there are little things we can do in our own homes to keep the planet healthy for many yuletide seasons to come.

When Bill Balter wanted to do something charitable that would also promote green buildings, his friend Alec Roberts suggested giving 1,000 light bulbs.

Not just any glass orbs, but a donation of compact fluorescent light bulbs, the energy-efficient lighting of the future that requires two-thirds less electricity and helps curb the greenhouse gases that create global warming.

Roberts is the executive director of Community Housing Innovations Inc., a nonprofit housing and human services agency that runs 500 apartments in Westchester and three other counties.

He knew Balter's gift would not only help the environment, it would lower his tenants' electric bills.

"It's a great gift because it educates people about the problem and about the solution," Roberts said yesterday. "In the case of light bulbs, it's a no-brainer."

So Balter ponied up about \$2,000 to give residents of 75-91 N. Kensico Ave. the bulbs and some help in balancing their already stretched monthly budgets.

Ernest Brown, one of the recipients, said yesterday he couldn't tell the difference between the old-style light bulbs he had and the new ones. That's actually good news. When they first came out, the compact flourescents didn't perform well enough to get people to switch.

He said he would be able to tell the difference if his \$50 per month electric bill went down.

"Then I'll really like them," he said.

Mary Brinson, another resident, was almost incredulous when I asked the obvious question about looking forward to lower electric bills.

"Who wouldn't be into saving money?" Brinson said. "We're all into saving money, definitely."

Yes, we are. Which is why the new lights make "cents" for all of us.

Sure, they're a little more expensive on the front end - as much as \$1.50 or \$2 apiece as opposed to a traditional bulb's cost of about 50 cents each.

Roberts, a self-confessed green building enthusiast, said his research shows that running a new compact fluorescent light bulb two hours a day will give you a 500 percent return on your investment over the life of the bulb, something you can't get on many other purchases these days.

Do an Internet search for Energy Star, the joint project of the U.S. Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency, and you'll find some fun facts:

- If every American home replaced just one light bulb with a compact fluorescent bulb, we could save enough energy to light more than 2.5 million homes for a year and cut greenhouse gases equal to almost 800,000 cars.
- They use less energy, provide the same light and can last up to 10 times longer than traditional light bulbs.
- For every one used, a power plant would produce 450 fewer pounds of emissions over the bulb's lifetime.
- They produce an estimated 70 percent less heat, which might not be so great in the winter, but certainly cuts cooling costs in the summer.

So this holiday season, when you screw in light bulbs on the Christmas tree or your electrified menorah, make a new year's resolution to be a smarter electricity consumer in 2007. You'll breathe easier.

So will your grandchildren.
