

## Families Get Help with Heating From Fortuna

January 19, 2007 - Fortuna Energy Inc. has donated \$60,000 to help families in four Southern Tier counties with their utility bills this winter. The grant is a \$10,000 increase over the company's 2006 grant allowing Tioga County, N.Y. to be added to the counties receiving assistance.

The money will be used after the existing federal Low Income HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Program) grants are depleted, says Laura M. Opelt, executive director of Catholic Charities of Steuben County, adding that the federal Energy Information Administration predicts that the HEAP grants will cover less than 40 percent of the home heating costs of eligible families.

Nancy Brand of Schuyler Outreach, which dispenses HEAP in Schuyler, said she had to turn down four or five applicants a week because there isn't enough money for them. She said the Fortuna grant will help a few more families in Schuyler.

Jim O'Driscoll, president of Fortuna Energy Inc., said the company wants to have a positive impact on the communities where it is located. "We at Fortuna Energy recognize that even in mild winters like this one, the cost of home heating can be very difficult for some local residents, and we are again pleased to support Catholic Charities' efforts to help our neighbors in need."

Opelt said last year's Fortuna grant of \$50,000 for Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties helped 270 households. The average amount of assistance was \$176 she said. Although this winter is milder, home heating bills are still expected to average \$873 a household greatly exceeding the average HEAP grant of \$340 a household, she said.

The \$60,000 grant will be dispersed to the distributing agencies in the four counties according to poverty statistics: Turning Point (Steuben County), \$24,640; Second Place East (Chemung County), \$22,197; Schuyler Outreach (Schuyler County), \$4,086; and Tioga Outreach Center, \$9,077.



Left to right: Laura Opelt of Steuben Catholic Charities, Bridget Steed of Schuyler/ Chemung Catholic Charities, Jim O'Driscoll of Fortuna Energy, Christine Sanchirico of Tompkins/ Tioga Catholic Charities, and Mike Gehl of Schuyler Catholic Charities