



# COLORADO BUILDING GREEN

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## Green Leaders

### Colorado's Thought Leaders Speak Out on Green Design

#### Ed Thomas, Intermountain Energy

by Dan Loffreda, Plateau Equipment Supply Co.

If you ask Ed Thomas for advice on which renewable energy system is best for residential or commercial buildings, you may be surprised by the answer. Not that he would be at a loss for suggestions. After all, as manager of Intermountain Energy, (a subsidiary of the Delta Montrose Electric Association) Ed spearheaded an initiative that drove the sales and installation of over 300 geothermal heat pump systems throughout Southwest Colorado. As the Director of the newly established Market Development division, he leads DMEA's efforts in promoting a portfolio of renewable energy technologies on the Western Slope

Before skipping to the comparative merits of solar panels, fuel cells, windmills, or geothermal systems, Ed would instead ask you three key questions: "what do you want to accomplish with your renewable system?"; "is your current energy usage as efficient as it can be?"; and "is your building as well insulated as possible in order to minimize energy wastage?". For Ed, a renewable energy system without an equal focus on conservation and efficiency fills only half the cup. He would encourage you to focus first on minimizing energy wastage in your home or building, and only then focus on how the energy is generated. "Why waste

### Conservation, Efficiency and Renewables



Project Site with Drilling Rigs

the wattage after you've worked so hard to generate it through your solar panel?" is a question Ed often poses.

Another key point is to concentrate on total energy usage, rather than just electricity usage. In Ed's experience, many people neglect to include the heating and cooling costs in their calculations, and most fail to include energy leakage. "I focus the discussion first on how some

relatively small changes can shave energy usage from their current wattage load" counsels Ed, "then we can talk about generating the energy from solar panels or other renewable sources". The goal should be to ensure that the energy you generate from a renewable source is supported by proper insulation and windows. Ed cautions "don't put a Cadillac quality system into a leaky, non-insulated house. Make

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## Ed Thomas, Intermountain Energy

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sure you use cellulose fiberglass insulation before you put money into a renewable system like geothermal heating and cooling”

Ed developed this holistic approach to sustainable energy – Conservation, Efficiency and Renewables – through experiences he gained over a 20 year career in the energy industry. After completing degrees in Communications and Marketing, and following a stint in the military, Ed began his career as a Communications Manager at the Edison Electric Institute. He had a first hand view of Congress’ development of the Energy bills during the 1980’s energy crisis. From those formative experiences Ed moved on to program development and implementation roles in demand side electricity management, water utility efficiency, internet based home energy audits, energy rebate processing, and energy efficiency home improvement loans. This wealth of experience during a turbulent time in U.S. energy policy gave Ed an appreciation of the need to infuse a solid dose of practi-

cality along with ideals. “Energy conservation doesn’t have to be about shivering in a cold, dark house” quips Ed. “Rather, what’s the best application, the most appropriate use of the energy used to heat, cool and light your house based upon your overall goals?” In Ed’s experience, this last part is an important, often missed point. “In defining what you are trying to accomplish, you need to be realistic. There’s no such thing as a zero-energy house”.

Ed came to Intermountain Energy and parent company Delta Montrose Electric Association three years ago. He found real synergies between his triple-prong approach to the energy services business and DMEA’s mission, vision and values. One thing that impressed Ed is DMEA’s balance of social, environmental and community goals with quantitative, metric driven objectives. Ed resonated with DMEA’s combination of values such as “we exist to serve rather than to make a profit”, with bottom-line objectives like delivering energy savings of 25% to members and using key operational efficiency metrics for continuous process improvement.

This focus on leading the pack, on innovative thinking and most importantly, permission to fail, provide a perfect environment for Ed’s rapid-fire style. As Director of the Market Development Division

Ed focuses on three key areas: delivering 25% savings to members who participate in energy efficiency programs; leading other energy coops in promoting renewable energy projects and distributive energy technologies; and making DMEA the nation’s consulting choice for utility programs that promote convenience, comfort and efficiency. Ed’s role brings him into contact with other cooperatives, with electric utilities, with renewable energy equipment suppliers, and local, state and federal agencies. Current ‘hot’ proj-

ects include the Home Energy Makeover contest, designed to educate members on home energy improvements that minimize energy wastage, the Efficient Lighting program that helps local non-profits generate revenue by reselling energy efficient bulbs to DMEA members, and facilitating the Million solar Roof program throughout the Western Slope

Ed’s future vision is to replicate the DMEA model into a turnkey solution that includes creative financing and is easily transferable to other cooperatives and utilities. He has already been contacted by Manitoba Hydro of Canada, seeking assistance in promoting geothermal energy programs to residents throughout the state of Manitoba. Closer to home, Ed sees encouraging signs in the number of Coloradoans looking into energy efficiency and renewable sources. “We are seeing a lot of older people coming to Montrose who have a much higher intrinsic value for the environment” notes Ed. “Many of them come from California and Texas, and carry with them the shock of outrageous utility bills”. Ed sees these new arrivals as a great fit for his programs, as they tend to be more open to the concept of an up front investment in order to realize substantial monthly savings down stream. Ed’s ultimate goal is to make his Conservation, Efficiency and Renewables approach affordable and acceptable to everyone.

“I’d like to take this out of the realm of ‘green’, to make it mainstream, the right thing for people to do, and make it economical to everyone”. By addressing the financing aspect, Ed’s hopes to enable anyone who so chooses, to have their electricity generated from a renewable source rather than from a fossil fuel, and of course, “facilitating them getting their choice from the DMEA grid.”



Ed Thomas

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