Children’s Recovery Center Success Story:

Saving Energy and Changing Lives

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Introduction to Children’s Recovery Center

The Children’s Recovery Center of Northern California opened its 15,000 square foot facility in 1998. Every year, the organization’s 100+ employees care for dozens of infants and children with long-term respiratory conditions. They have served hundreds of patients since the center opened.

Two years ago, Donna Walker came to Children’s Recovery Center (CRC) to supervise its operations. As the center’s Director of Patient Care Services she oversees patient care, facilities management and regulatory compliance.

For CRC’s staff, the patients and their families come first. Offering a comfortable living environment is just as important as providing the highest quality of care because many of CRC’s patients call the center home for extended periods of time, up to three years in some cases.

Patients First, At Any Cost

When Donna first started at the center, managing the organization’s energy use took a back seat to providing the best patient care.

Everything changed last year, when faced with possible funding reductions—enough to put CRC at risk for closing. These potential cuts motivated Donna and the center’s Maintenance Supervisor, Doug Stephens, to identify impactful ways to reduce operational costs and keep the center open.

A Call, a Workshop and So Much More

CRC reached out to PG&E through the Business Customer Service Center at 1-800-468-4743 and connected with the center’s local PG&E representative and trusted advisor, Crystal. In addition, CRC attended a local PG&E workshop. Not only did CRC get access to previous bills and energy usage information, but it also learned it’s on a time-of-use rate, meaning it pays variable rates based on when energy is used. The center’s PG&E representative assessed the business and identified simple ways to save energy and money on time-of-use rates.
Making Time-of-Use Work for the Center

“There are some things we can’t change. Laundry was a variable we could do something about.” —Doug Stephens

The CRC team felt some apprehension when they learned they were on a time-of-use rate. Like many businesses, CRC operates on very slim margins, so paying the up-front costs for many energy-saving adjustments, such as installing solar panels, is not always feasible. More importantly, the business of caring for infants and children with long-term health conditions leaves little room for compromise.

But after a quick analysis of the center’s energy usage, CRC discovered that housekeeping—laundry specifically—was an area in which it could save money. The issue was simple: they were using washers and dryers during peak electric-demand hours, when time-of-use rates are higher.

Shifting housekeeping duties to the evening would positively affect the bottom line, but Donna knew that change could be challenging. With this in mind, Donna notified her staff of the switch well in advance, offered them work schedule options, and solicited feedback on what else they could do. Everyone became a part of the solution.

At a Glance, How Children’s Recovery Center Saved:

- Partnered with its local PG&E representative to identify ways to save energy and money.
- Installed energy-efficient lighting.
- Prioritized the maintenance of current appliances and HVAC systems.
- Took advantage of time-of-use rates by shifting laundry and housekeeping activities to off-peak electric-demand hours (9:30 p.m.–8:30 a.m.).
- Engaged all employees to help make small changes.
- TOTAL ANNUAL SAVINGS: $5,600*

*Savings calculated based on time periods before and after rate changes and EE upgrades went into effect: 9/07/10 – 8/03/11 and 10/04/11 – 8/31/12

Small Changes with Big Outcomes

During an on-site visit, CRC’s local PG&E representative identified simple and affordable ways for them to save, starting with light fixtures, exit signs and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems (HVAC).

CRC originally had light fixtures that used four T12 40-watt bulbs but was able to replace them with two T8 32-watt bulbs, cutting its energy usage by more than half. Better still, the more energy-efficient lights are brighter, and they don’t make a humming noise—creating a more pleasant living environment for the children. CRC also followed the advice of its local PG&E representative by replacing exit signs with more energy-efficient ones and contacting PECI, a third-party energy consultancy, to check that HVAC systems were operating properly.

What’s more, with the help of Ecology Action’s RightLights and PECI’s AirCare Plus® programs, CRC upgraded light fixtures and tuned up HVAC systems at no cost. CRC received close to $9,000 worth of rebates and incentives and saved over $5,600 on its energy bill that year as a result of energy efficiency measures and TOU rates.
A Team Effort

“[The staff] ask occasionally, ‘Are we really saving?’ I say, ‘Oh yes, tons.’” —Doug Stephens

Today, energy savings is part of CRC’s quality of life initiative. Every month the housekeeping department reports savings, so employees get to see that all of their efforts are making a difference. Saving energy is seen as an integral part of keeping the center open and, ultimately, helping more children and families.

What You Can Do For Your Business:

PG&E can help you find ways to take control of your business’ energy costs.

- Visit My Energy online at www.pge.com/myenergy to view your energy usage and evaluate your rate options.
- Learn more about time-of-use rates at www.pge.com/TOU and discover ways to save.
- Contact your local PG&E representative or call our Business Customer Service Center at 1-800-468-4743.

What Is Time-of-Use Pricing?

“We are a 24/7 operation, so there are things we cannot change . . . [but] it was clear that I was using my most energy-intensive equipment at peak hours.” —Donna Walker

Beginning November 2012 and continuing over the next several years, many PG&E small and medium business customers will move from a single flat electric rate to time-of-use rates. This is part of a statewide plan mandated by the California Public Utilities Commission to ensure greater power reliability and a better energy future.

Time-of-use rates are slightly higher during summer weekday afternoons when electric demand is higher, typically noon to 6 p.m., May through October. In return, time-of-use rates are lower at all other times. This means that when you use energy is just as important as how much you use. If you conserve electricity in your business during peak hours, you can save money on your electric bills.*

“Pick up the phone and call... I’m a really good nurse, and I’m not a bad manager, but this is not something I have any expertise in and the [PG&E] partnership is wonderful. Saves the grid energy. Saves us money. And it really does feel like a solid partnership... Everybody benefits at the end of the day.” —Donna Walker

*Energy efficiency and TOU results may vary by rate schedule. Some rates include demand charges. Demand is based on the highest usage of electricity in a single 15-minute period during the billing month, measured in kilowatts [kW].