

## Updated light bulbs: A bright savings idea

They mean economic and environmental benefits for local businesses, large and small.

By EMMA L. CAREW, Star Tribune | July 24, 2008 - 12:28 AM

Ali Mishkee always worries about light bulbs.

With about 70 bulbs between the bar and dining room of the Lone Spur Bar and Grill where Mishkee works as general manager, at least two burn out a day, which means waiting until no one is eating under the lights so that someone can change the bulb.

But those concerns soon may fade. Lone Spur is in the middle of overhauling its lighting system, installing lights that are more energy-efficient and that also last longer.

With energy prices soaring, Lone Spur, a Tex-Mex and barbecue restaurant in Minnetonka, is among an increasing number of companies that are swapping energy-hungry bulbs for more efficient lighting. To help foot the bill, they are tapping into a partnership between Xcel Energy Inc. and consultants such as the Retrofit Companies.

Retrofit, in the business for about 20 years, is one of the largest of its type in the state and offers the most comprehensive services, said CEO and founder Steve Kath.

Kath said lighting specialists analyze a site with their special knowledge of electrical systems and energy-efficient alternatives. They then create a lighting solution, trading out the old bulbs for new options, and work with Xcel Energy on some financing and rebate options. Upon completion, Retrofit recycles the old bulbs.

Kath said that Retrofit's recommendations can save between 35 and 70 percent of a company's

lighting bill. The savings add up. For schools and some commercial businesses, lighting can account for as much as 60 percent of the total electric bill, according to Xcel Energy.

Over the past few years, as a green mind-set has been growing, so has Kath's business.

In its first year, 1986, the company did about 50 jobs, Kath said. Last year it did 192. And so far in 2008, it's done 207. The company is on track to finish about 400 lighting retrofits by the end of the year, he said.

Mishkee said one of Lone Spur's owners had done a lighting retrofit on another property and wanted to do one with the restaurant.

Tom Rucker, a lighting consultant for the Retrofit Companies, suggested swapping out all 115 light bulbs, most of them incandescent, for more efficient models such as compact fluorescent bulbs and T-8 fluorescents with reflectors to redirect the light.

The changes would result in 66,512 pounds of greenhouse gas reduction a year, the equivalent of 6.5 cars being taken off the road, Rucker said.

The new bulbs in the dining room have a life of more than 18,000 hours compared with traditional bulbs' 2,500 hours, much to Mishkee's relief.

Rucker said the new lighting system will save Lone Spur about 70 percent, or just under \$2,500, on its annual electric bill.

"It makes economic sense," Mishkee said of the updated lighting.

Rucker said many businesses don't know that Xcel Energy has programs to help them pay for lighting retrofits.

Lone Spur, for instance, will receive \$2,285 from Xcel Energy's One-Stop Efficiency Shop program to finance more than half of its \$4,456 lighting retrofit.

Jamie Altenbach-Fitzke, a lighting consultant with the Center for Energy and Environment, a nonprofit that runs One-Stop, said its program has quadrupled since it began in 2000.

Most people don't know they've got outdated lights, she said. The retrofits make sense to a lot of business owners, especially those interested in energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions.

### A turnkey operation

Altenbach-Fitzke said Retrofit is unusual because it handles the entire job, from the energy audit to the lighting replacements.

Kath said utility rates have increased so sharply in the last two years that businesses are looking to lighting retrofits as a cheaper investment than other conservation options, such as sealing off windows. Retrofits also have a much faster rate of return, he said.

"We can save on those utility bills, and it's the right thing to do for the carbons and the greenhouse effect," Mishkee said. "It's a no-brainer as far as we're concerned."

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