



## ***A Win-Win-Win: Getting Guests to Switch to Renewable Energy for Powering their Homes***

### Requirement:

You must be in a state that allows people to select their own energy provider.

### Why Do It:

In a visitor survey, Phipps learned that nearly nine out of ten Phipps guests consider climate change a threat and are seeking easy-to-understand information to take action. Phipps understands that climate change is a topic that can feel so daunting that people may think they cannot have an impact; with this in mind, we wanted to create a program that demonstrated that getting started is much easier than many may think. There is power in numbers, and visitors can see the multiplicative impact when they and others take action.

### How It Works:

We started the [Make the Switch at Phipps! Green Power Drive](#) in January 2017 to engage our visitors to take action to reduce their carbon footprint. We engaged a partnership with Green Mountain Energy (GME), but other gardens could do the same with any renewable energy provider. GME buys memberships from Phipps in bulk at a discount — 100 at a time at \$50 each. (Our regular family memberships retail for \$99 each.) They then use the memberships as an incentive to get people to switch their electricity provider while they are visiting Phipps.

### Why It Works:

Typically if someone joins Phipps while visiting, we credit their admission fee to the price of a new membership. When someone joins through an on-site switch to green energy through Green Mountain, they get the free membership but do not get their admission fee back. Depending on how many people are on a particular membership — commonly anywhere from one to four — we end up close to or better than whole with the combined \$50 from Green Mountain plus admission fees. Existing members that switch get a free six-month extension to their membership on which Phipps essentially breaks even — we get \$50 from Green Mountain and the member gets a 6 month extension =  $\$99/2 = \$49.50$ .

The program has been win-win-win so far. Phipps gets new and renewing members, visitors invest in green energy and receive a free Phipps membership, and Green Mountain gets a new customer. From January 2017 through July 2019 we enrolled over 4,500 families. It has been our most successful membership recruitment program to date.

### Messaging:

We often hear about the carbon dioxide problem as measured in tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. But no one knows what a ton of CO<sub>2</sub> looks like. Instead we reframe the message and relate it to barrels of oil. Powering the average Pennsylvania home emits approximately the same amount of carbon dioxide as burning 16 barrels of oil. We demonstrate this by lining our front walkway with 16 barrels of oil (this is not necessary, but it has a dramatic effect). People can relate to this concept, and they can also see the power in numbers. They may be saving 16 barrels of oil, but 4,500 families switching is equal to not burning 72,000 barrels of oil a year.



#### Obstacles:

We were initially concerned that as a nonprofit operating a city-owned institution that if we allowed an organization to set up and solicit business at no charge at Phipps, we could potentially be forced to allow other organizations to do so too. Our attorney suggested we charge them a nominal rental fee each day they are here to prevent that from happening. We charge GME \$25 a day every day they set up at Phipps.

#### Historic Media Release:

**For Release:** Thurs., Dec. 14, 2017

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## **Phipps Conservatory's Make the Switch at Phipps! Green Power Drive Reaches 2,000 Households**

*New information, resources and tools available to take the next steps in addressing climate change.*

**Pittsburgh, Pa.** — Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens has helped 2,000 households convert from traditional electricity to fossil-free renewable energy through its Make the Switch at Phipps! Green Power Drive in partnership with Green Mountain Energy, a milestone reached today. Powering the average Pennsylvania home emits approximately the same amount of carbon dioxide as burning 16 barrels of oil would emit. At the end of a year, Phipps estimates these guests will have prevented 16,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions — equivalent to saving 33,605 barrels of oil from being burned!

Phipps initiated the Make the Switch at Phipps! Green Power Drive to show guests that making a measurable difference is easy. Guests who switch their home electricity source to renewable, fossil-free energy during their visit to the Conservatory receive a free, year-long family/household membership, and existing members receive a free six-month extension.

Phipps is dedicated to showing that sustainable practices are good for people and good for the planet, making the world a more beautiful place. Demonstrating this commitment, since 2005, all of the electricity used at Phipps is renewable, some of which is produced on site. Since 2010, all of the carbon dioxide emitted in order to heat Phipps buildings has been offset. All lights used in the Winter Flower Show and Light Garden are energy-efficient LEDs. And from 2005 to 2016, Phipps reduced carbon emissions from heating, cooling and powering its buildings by 56% per square foot, which is double the Paris Climate agreement target of 26 – 28% by 2025.

In a visitor survey, Phipps learned that nearly nine out of ten Phipps guests consider climate change a threat and are seeking easy-to-understand information to take action. Phipps understands that climate change is a topic that can feel so daunting that people may think they cannot have an impact; however, getting started is much easier than they may think!

In addition to Make the Switch at Phipps!, Phipps has introduced Easy Steps with Big Impact for Climate Change – the new online resource at [hipps.conservatory.org/EasySteps](http://hipps.conservatory.org/EasySteps) that provides 10 simple, effective ways to take the next step in climate action. This resource will help guests who want to make a difference but don't know where to begin. Each step includes real-world tips, personal examples from the experts at Phipps, plus additional resources to dig deeper in taking the next crucial steps toward a greener lifestyle.

Phipps recently garnered national recognition when it received the EPA's 2017 Green Power Leadership Award for Make the Switch at Phipps! and its educational sustainability programs. Among organizations registered with the EPA's Green Power Partnership, Phipps is one of only

six institutions in the Museums, Parks and Zoos category and the only public garden that uses 100% renewable energy.

For more information on Phipps' sustainability leadership and commitment, visit [phipps.conservatory.org/green-innovation](https://phipps.conservatory.org/green-innovation).

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**About Phipps:** Founded in 1893, Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh, Pa. is a green leader among public gardens with a mission to inspire and educate all with the beauty and importance of plants; to advance sustainability and promote human and environmental well-being through action and research; and to celebrate its historic glasshouse. Learn more: [phipps.conservatory.org](https://phipps.conservatory.org).

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