Program makes efficient homes

ECU's heating efficiency program assisted 122 homebuyers in eastern North Carolina last year conserve energy and save nearly $80,000 in fuel costs.

The "Upgrade & Save" program, administered by **Leslie Pagliari,** a professor in the College of Technology and Computer Science, works with buyers of new homes in 17 counties to exchange their standard electric furnaces and air-conditioning units for energy-efficient heat pumps.

Pagliari with a recent group of TSYS graduates

"Most manufactured homes currently come factory-equipped with a heating system known as electric resistance heat," Pagliari said. "Although it's the least expensive system to install, it is by far the most expensive heating system to operate."

The program began in 2003 through a partnership between the State

Energy Office, ECU and area manufactured home retailers. It covers the cost difference – about $700 per home – between the standard electric furnace/air conditioning unit and an energy efficient heat pump. The manufactured home retailer handles the heat pump upgrade for new home purchasers and is reimbursed by ECU TECS for each verified upgrade.

Pagliari visits the new homes to train the owners on the heat pump. Last year's 122 participants were able to save on average $643 in fuel costs this past heating season, Pagliari said, provided that they operated the heat pump in accordance with the recommended settings.

Owners of existing homes built in 2001 or later can be reimbursed up to $1,500 to upgrade their electric furnaces to energy efficient heat pumps. A $500 rebate is also available to home retailers who sell ENERGY STAR rated homes.