

# Efficiency Vermont's Efficiency Excellence Network (EEN) Contractor Spotlight: Net Zero Design, Waterbury Center, Vermont

INTERVIEW WITH JAKE VISI, OWNER

G.E.T. Staff

**G.E.T.:** How did you get started in this industry?

**Jake Visi:** In 2008 or 2009, a friend who owned a horticulture company invited me to go to a show in Colorado. I helped run a booth and meet people. I quickly saw the value for horticultural use of LEDs as the market moved away from high-intensity discharge and florescent lights.

**When did you start your company?**

**JV:** Net zero design was started in 2016.

**What is your service territory?**

**JV:** Most of our clients are in Vermont, but we do projects all over New England and New York because many of our clients have facilities outside of Vermont.

**What is your area of expertise?**

**JV:** I like to focus on existing buildings, which means doing an audit, assessment, and implementation. We also work to get the best incentives for our customers. Our special work is to take an authentic design-build approach, dealing with each space individually. Each type of space has to have an application that takes its type into consideration. We are involved in every step of the process.

**What projects do people try to do themselves that really should be done professionally?**

**JV:** Tubular LED lamps, known as TLEDs, are products that replace existing fluorescent tubes. There are often better approaches, partly because they might not be compatible with existing flores-



Net Zero Design wins the 2023 Partner of the Year award for Efficiency Vermont's Best Practices Exchange. Jake Visi (center), owner of Net Zero Design accepting his award. Also pictured are Cathy Reynold (left), account manager with Efficiency Vermont and Peter Walke (right), director of Efficiency Vermont. (Greg Nesbitt Photography)

cent ballasts, which often need to be replaced. Also, replacing old fluorescent lights with TLEDs fails to take advantage of better technology with incentives, which is likely to save money.

**If you could only choose one type of project to reduce someone's carbon footprint or improve efficiency, what would it be and why?**



**JV:** Controls, controls, controls.

Some people would be better off installing a photo cell with their existing lighting technology than switching to more modern lighting without controls. These are things that have to be done thoughtfully.

**Can you share one job project (and some details) that really stands out to you as moving from inefficiency to efficiency?**

**JV:** One project we did at a casting company is memorable. Their environment was loud and dark. They had very antiquated lighting. We integrated controls and brought light levels way up. We probably saved 200,000 kWh annually, but we also increased safety and morale. They have called us back several

times to do more work.

**What is it in your field of specialty is most valuable (related to energy efficiency or the EEN) that our readers ought to know about?**

**JV:** It's the fact that I'm going to come in, look at the facility, and use an integrated design approach, working with

every space, up to the commissioning of the lighting. Also, we don't have any commitments to any particular product line, so we can use the best products on the market.

**Why should people use an Efficiency Excellence Network member over someone else?**

**JV:** These are the people who have been vetted, are most qualified, and have a proven track record. They live, eat, and breathe their part of the industry.

**What are the best ways to finance projects (or what incentives are available) for residential or commercial projects?**

**JV:** One tool that we have used, and a lot of people don't know about, is equipment back leases. What you do is to harvest the energy savings to create a positive cash flow. We can set up a lease and use the equipment for collateral. Low interest rates can come from organizations like Vermont Economic Development Agency, known as VEDA. Efficiency Vermont is a great resource because they can help with the custom incentive program. I will focus on non-profits because of the Inflation Reduction Act incentives.

**What are some questions you recommend customers ask when selecting someone to do work to meet energy efficiency goals?**

**JV:** Customers should ask, "What other facilities like ours have you done? And can I talk to them?" Active referrals can speak volumes.

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