

Green revolution fuel created in Ontario

By Jason Schultz – Mail Reporter (Wayne County Mail March 26, 2009)

ONTARIO-Efforts by local Chambers of Commerce gave dozens of people a chance to see the efforts of companies in Ontario focused on renewable and environmentally-sustainable energy during Tuesday's Business After Hours Networking Opportunity.

During the evening's events, guests were given a tour of several businesses in the industrial park off Route 104 that are utilizing alternative energy to create a clean and thriving economy. Located in the shadow of Harbec Plastic's well-known wind turbine, Northern Biodiesel and Sustainable Energy Development (SED) showed those gathered that green energy can refer to the health of the economy as much as it now does to the environment.

The tours were sponsored by the Ontario, Sodus, and Williamson Chambers of Commerce.

John Vavalo, vice president of Sales and Marketing for Northern Biodiesel, led a tour for the crowd of about 50 individuals interested in the modern-day alchemy taking place in Ontario's backyard. Vavalo explained how the plant is able to turn used cooking oil from local businesses – as well as canola oil grown specifically for this purpose – into usable diesel fuel, which the company then sells to fleets of diesel-powered vehicles.

Vavalo said the product, besides environmentally-friendly, also allows Northern biodiesel to be competitive with fossil-fuel suppliers.

“Right now, we're able to produce biodiesel for a little over \$2 per gallon,” Vavalo said. “Regular diesel wholesale is around a dollar-seventy, but since normal diesel is taxed at 60 cents per gallon and ours isn't, we can sell it at the same price or lower as regular diesel, which is a huge advantage for us.”

Bob Bechtold, owner of Harbec Plastics, said the facility can produce as much as 22 million gallons of biodiesel fuel per year, and sees it being a big part of the plans for the Wayne County Industrial Sustainability Park (WISP). Bechtold and Vavalo explained that part of the plan for WISP involves greater cooperation and sharing of resources between members of the industrial park. For example, Vavalo said there are plans to utilize the electricity and hot water produced at Harbec as by-products of its industrial processes to help produce biodiesel, a symbiotic process he said would allow both companies to prosper while reducing their environmental impact as well.

Bechtold said changes in government policy will help alternative energy companies to become much more mainstream.

“The important thing for us is that we finally have a government that is talking about and recognizing the importance of green and alternative energy,” he said. “Another change that will be big for our industry in a carbon cap and trade system, which will factor in the (environmental) cost of fossil fuels and give an advantage to alternative energy.”

After the tour of the biodiesel facility, guests received an illuminating presentation from SED founder, owner and CEO Kevin Schulte, who explained that wind power is not only competitive with, but cheaper than most retail electricity. Schulte said he expects to see a huge growth opportunity for wind energy, particularly for small businesses and rural homes.

His presentation showed that SED has had extensive experience installing wind turbines throughout Massachusetts, from 10 kilowatt turbines to power rural homes, to giant 1.5 megawatt wind mills over twenty stories tall.

Schulte said net metering, which allows users of renewable energy sources to receive retail credit based on the electricity they generate, will be a boon for wind power in New York, as will a 30 percent discount for wind power that was part of the recently passed stimulus spending plan. Due to the increasing costs both monetary and environmental of fossil fuels, Schulte predicts a bright future for his company.

“Though I don’t see wind power coming to suburbia; that looks like it will be solar land, the prospects for wind to expand in rural areas like much of Ontario is very positive, and we expect to be very busy in the coming years,” Schulte said.

Ontario Councilman Jim Switzer, who was one of several town government officials present. Besides being impressed with the information provided by these companies, Switzer also said there is a possibility for the town to benefit from use of green energy.

“There’s been talk of Wayne Central schools building a wind turbine to power four school buildings, as well as the possibly the fire hall along Ontario Center (Road),” he said. “Wind energy is something I think the town should be looking at more closely, especially for our sewage treatment plants and pumping stations. I think there’s a lot of money to be saved with the right use of renewable energy where it’s feasible.”