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Energy & The Environment

Synergy and critical mass propel local clean tech sector

Philadelphia Business Journal - by [Peter Key](#) Staff Writer

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Efforts to make the area a clean-technology hub are gaining momentum.

Entrepreneurial interest was in evidence last month at [WBlank Rome's](#) 2nd Annual Mid-Atlantic Cleantech Investment Forum at the [WAcademy of Natural Sciences](#).

Between 350 and 400 people attended, up from 150 to 175 last year. Six companies presented and six exhibited, double the number of the previous year, and organizers said 25 applied to present or exhibit, despite no great effort to solicit participants.

"With more awareness and people getting together to bolster it, I think it can certainly continue to take hold," said organizer Thomas Dwyer, who founded a clean-tech practice at Blank Rome with another partner in the Center City law firm, Louis Rappaport.

Another indication of interest is that the clean-tech sector already has a group devoted to it. Cleantech Alliance Mid-Atlantic held six events last year which drew, on average, 200 people.

The alliance was started by Kevin Brown, a senior partner at the Valley Forge office of [W Hobbs & Towne Inc.](#), an executive search firm specializing in the clean-tech industry, along with Scott Edward Anderson, the founder and principal of VerdeStrategy, which works with clean-tech companies.

"There were a lot of people and companies involved in this space throughout the region,



Curt Hudson
Andrew Daga of Momentum Dynamics.
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but they didn't know each other," Anderson said.

The region has an impressive and growing set of natural and economic assets to offer clean-tech companies.

Geographically, Philadelphia is located between Washington, D.C., where energy policy gets made, and New York City, where it gets financed. Its position in the Boston-to-Washington megalopolis puts it in one of the most densely populated, and therefore largest power-consuming areas, in the country. That adds up to a lot of potential buyers for energy-efficiency technology, from construction materials to demand-management software, and for clean energy, as the area's businesses, universities, government agencies and building owners look to reduce their carbon footprints.

Additionally, Philadelphia is home to [PJM Interconnection](#), the Valley Forge-based nonprofit that manages the largest electrical grid in North America. In addition to being a possible customer for energy-management technologies, it's a source of people to lead companies that develop them, such as Audrey Zibelman, its former chief operating officer, who founded Conshohocken-based smart grid implementer [Viridity Energy Inc.](#)

At least four locally based venture-capital firms specialize in clean-tech investing, as well. Blank Rome's Rappaport said a growing number of the wealthy individual investors called angels are starting to make clean-tech investments.

The energy policies of Pennsylvania and New Jersey are favorable to the clean-tech sector. Both states have laws in place that require power suppliers to get an increasing amount of their electricity from alternative or renewable generation methods over time.

Additionally, the administration of Gov. Ed Rendell sees clean technology as a major tool for economic development. That has resulted in efforts not only to attract firms to the area, but to fund clean-tech development, too.

For example, [Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Southeastern Pennsylvania](#), a state-funded economic-development organization, is investing up to \$750,000 in seed and early-stage companies trying to commercialize alternative-energy and clean technologies.

It also is working on making the Philadelphia Navy Yard, where it is based, and the Bridge Business Center in Bristol centers for distributed power production and management, sustainable building systems development and smart-grid development.

Ben Franklin's work on distributed power management at the Navy Yard is being led by [Pennsylvania State University](#), includes the Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center, and has received \$700,000 from the state.

Penn State also is receiving \$5.5 million from the U.S. Department of Energy to establish two clean-tech centers at the Navy Yard. It's getting \$2 million for the Mid-Atlantic Clean Energy Applications Center, which will promote the adoption of clean-energy technology by industry and government in six Mid-Atlantic states, and \$3.5 million to establish the Mid-Atlantic Solar Resource and Training Center.

Other schools in the area also are jumping on the clean-technology bandwagon.

For instance, Drexel is working with Viridity on the company's power-management system, which Viridity has deployed at its campus. Additionally, Drexel's College of Engineering is hosting the Advanced Energy Leadership Conference, which concludes Friday, and looks at the future of energy in the area with a focus on advanced-energy and grid-management technologies.

Clean Tech Pioneers

The area's clean-technology companies come in all sizes and from a wide range of

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industries. Ones that have or plan to have sizable operations in the include:

Two large Spanish wind-energy firms, [Gamesa Corporación Tecnológica](#), which makes wind turbines at its plant in Fairless Hills, and wind-farm operator [Iberdrola SA](#), which has an office in Wayne.

[Comverge Inc.](#), an East Hanover, N.J.-based provider of power demand management services to commercial and industrial companies that entered the area nearly two years ago when it bought Enerwise Global Technologies Inc. of Kennett Square.

Two electric-car makers: Fisker Automotive of Irvine Corp., which is taking over a former General Motors Corp. plant in Newark, Del., and CT&T Co. Ltd. of Korea, which is looking for a site on the Delaware River for its first plant in the United States.

HelioSphera, an Athens, Greece, maker of solar panels that plans to open a plant at the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

[Momentum Dynamics Corp.](#), a Malvern company that is developing mats that wirelessly transmit electricity to the batteries of electric cars parked over them. “We think what we have is the equivalent of a killer app in the clean-tech revolution,” said Andrew Daga, its founder and CEO, who presented at Blank Rome’s CleanTech Forum.

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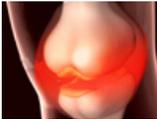
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