



## Inaugural CleanTech OC Conference Should Have Been Better Attended

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If attendees took anything other than swag away from the inaugural CleanTech OC Conference & Expo in Irvine Monday, it was this: the green revolution is back, baby.

After a red hot 2008, the clean technology industry was battered for a spell by the recession, but banks are back to lending, venture capitalists are capitalizing again and new technologies are making mad dashes to the market. Need a job? This is a sector that's actually hiring--right here, right now, in Orange County.

Sadly, not enough people got that message at the Irvine Hyatt, where CleanTech attendance was lighter than it should have been. That's too bad, because as **Brian Kremer** mentioned during an afternoon panel discussion on venture capital and clean technology, "This is a real industry, it has been here a long time and it will continue to grow."

It's the sector Kremer focuses on as a senior research analyst with ROTH Capital Partners, a Newport Beach-based investment banking firm. He is also a member of the board of CleanTech OC, a nonprofit trade association that only formed in February. But, as Orange County industry success stories would later reveal, many national leaders are and have been here for years.

**Arnold Klann**, CEO and president of Irvine-based BlueFire Renewables, which extracts sugar from waste to make ethanol, joked during his presentation that "this technology became an overnight success in over 18 years." That produced audible groans from young engineers, entrepreneurs and others in the half-full room hoping to strike quickly while the market's hot.

BlueFire develops plants next to landfills, something it has in common with another Irvine company, FlexEnergy, whose CEO **Joe Perry** gave one of the most-inspiring addresses of the afternoon. His company extracts methane from landfills and converts the pollutant into electricity.

"We think we can bring a clean-tech revolution in Orange County and throughout the world," said Perry, who noted his company was born here, is backed by local investors and is creating

jobs in this county and throughout Southern California.

The United States may import foreign oil, but one thing we produce here is a whole lot of trash. So, the idea of turning the gas that trash emits into energy should have widespread appeal. When one guy in the audience asked Perry why no one has got President **Barack Obama** on the horn to spread the news about FlexEnergy, the CEO coyly revealed the company just hired someone to strengthen government contacts.

Local government officials also shared success stories. **Aaron Klemm**, energy project manager with the city of Huntington Beach, detailed how the municipality assessed energy usage in its 200,000-square-foot civic center complex and spent \$265,000 to patch holes in its duct system and retrofit the facility with electricity and water-temperature controls. That investment gave the city a 200 percent rate of return.

Santa Ana Mayor **Miguel Pulido**, who sits on the board of the Orange County Transportation Authority and South Coast Air Quality Management District, also boasted about strides his city has made to clean up its act, but he added there is always more that can and should be done.

"We are blessed in California," Pulido said. "We have opportunities that don't exist elsewhere. Here in Orange County, we have a lot of folks pushing things."

Supervisor **Bill Campbell** talked about the solar, methane-to-energy and other environmental initiatives undertaken by the county, which he said is uniquely positioned to usher in a green future thanks to its residents' creativity and technological know-how, which is leftover from the aerospace industry.

Orange County's position in the clean-tech market was also on the mind of **David Jones**, managing partner of Costa Mesa's SAIL Venture Partners, during that earlier venture capital panel. "No slam to my brothers in the Silicon Valley," Jones said, "but how many more games can you put on a mobile device? We are trying to save the world."

But a message he and **Luke Hayes** of Craton Equity Partners of Los Angeles drove home was clean businesses should not rely on the government for grants, subsidies and other assistance. Yes, some of it is out there (or was), but as Hayes noted, it should be viewed as "icing on the cake." If they want his start-up dollars, green businesses must prove they will stand on their own without Uncle Sam's help.

Many presentations centered on automobiles. **Brian Olson**, the chief financial officer with Quantum Technologies, spoke of the Irvine firm's leading role in developing hydrogen-electric engines, hydrogen refueling stations and solar roofs for automobiles. Quantum's Q-Drive propulsion system is built into the world's first sports luxury plug-in hybrid car, from Irvine's Fisker Automotive, which Quantum co-founded in 2007.

Later in the afternoon, Olson would return to the stage with Quantum's president and CEO,

**Alan Niedzwiecki**, and board chairman, **Dale Rasmussen**, to receive CleanTech OC's first Company of the Year Award.

Among the most enlightening speakers was UC Irvine professor **Scott Samuelson**, the director of the National Fuel Cell Research Center that is located on campus. He led a lesson on cars that rely on hydrogen, electricity, natural gas, fuel cells and hybrid technologies--and their respective negative impacts on the planet.

He also warned the region is desperately lacking in the infrastructure that will be required to sustain such vehicles. For instance, he noted UCI right now has the "most advanced hydrogen station in the country," and it's often four deep with cars waiting to fill 'er up. That's because it's the *only* place in the county to do so, although two more are in the works.

Sounds like another growth industry, no?

Attendees also heard from **Steve Westly**, the state's former controller and unsuccessful Democratic nominee for governor in 2006. The former eBay executive is now a venture capitalist and board member with Tesla Motors, the electric sports car now coming to market.

Among the local companies exhibiting at the conference were: WasteFreeOC.com; Anaheim Public Utilities; KPMG's Irvine CleanTech team; UC Irvine's Sustainability Studies program; Sun Engineering Services of Garden Grove; Cal State Fullerton's Center for Sustainability; Ship & Shore Environmental Inc. of Signal Hill; Brandman (Chapman) University's Center for Sustainable Living; Bryan Crave CleanTech, a national green investment company with an Irvine office; and Green60.com, a Newport Beach company that provides paperless payroll services.