



Modern Energy matchmakers: Dan Gregory

Smart-grid CEO finds less resistance from utilities but says VC for new energy in ‘slow motion’

By Michele Ashby

Editor’s note: Michele Ashby of MiNE LLC has 20 years of experience in the natural resources industries. Over the past five years, she’s met and interviewed hundreds of new companies in the modern energy business.

In the first installment of the “Modern Energy Matchmaker” series, Ashby talks with Dan Gregory, chairman and founder of Green Energy Corp., a smart-grid company based in Greenwood Village, Colo. Its principals have been in the smart grid business for more than 25 years and understand the challenges the country faces with new energy supplies and an aging electrical system.



Ashby talks with Gregory about the investor landscape, relationships with utilities, and the important work he is doing to restore electrical power in Haiti.

Michele Ashby: In your role in the modern energy movement, you're plugged into the financial world. What are you hearing from investors right now -- what is their mindset, halfway through 2010?

Dan Gregory: As far as raising seed venture capital money, what I’m hearing from pretty much across the board is that there are certain very targeted VC funds that are active and interested in funding. GE just announced a fund and expects to put \$200 million into some smart-grid companies. But other than that, no, there’s not much activity. The only area I’m hearing a lot of activity in is in energy, and there’s not much. From both venture capital and seed money, it really is in slow motion, from what I’m hearing.

MA: Green Energy Corp. works with a lot of utilities. There's been a great deal of discussion in the industry about integrating new energy sources (solar, geothermal, wind, etc.). From your vantage point, how are utilities responding to these changes?

DG: I think they're committed to it. I think they've accepted it, committed to it, realized it's their best option. They're utilities, so they don't move at the pace that businesses move – especially emerging businesses like smart grid, which are trying to move faster than the industry to develop a new market. But there's no question they're moving as fast as they can responsibly move as major companies, and we'll see the results start to kick in pretty much immediately. There's momentum that's building, and I don't think there's any unreasonable resistance left in the utilities now.

MA: I know you've recently been involved in helping to rebuild Haiti after the devastating earthquake. Tell us about your involvement with the UN and the Clinton Foundation in restoring emergency power.

DG: The first step was that I developed a white paper introducing the concept of developing a global energy model – how developing and energy-poor nations can modernize and move forward with a bigger picture compared to just doing multiple projects without a roadmap.

We've been working with the U.S. government, and with the full cooperation of the Haitian government. Part of this has been developing a 30-step implementation plan, called a master charter. Everything from building new hydro dams, to repairing the port for easier access into Haiti – all those things are part of this plan. Those plans are being developed in a cross-functional task force I'm leading, with the Clinton Global Initiative as the host organization, in collaboration with the U.S. government.

The key here for all of this is that the Haitian government is driving this, and I am enabling them to put it together. We're not “putting something” on Haiti. It's their plan, and we're enabling them to make it happen.

For developing nations especially, they can't build a sustainable power system using fossil fuels. It's not only because of the environmental impact and the health impact – which are significant – but also, the economic impact is significant because the cost of fuel is so high, especially in the island nations. They just simply can't afford to continue and build power systems around these fossil fuels. Fossil fuels alone wipe out these projects – they're not viable. That dependence on oil and fossil fuels that we see in the U.S. is really intensified for developing nations. They just will never catch up if we keep going with coal plants and diesel fuels. That's really not something that's sustainable, never mind that it's really very dirty power.”

(MiNE's Modern Energy Investor Forum will take place in Denver, Sept. 22-25)

About Michele Ashby

Michele Ashby of MiNE LLC (www.minellc.com) is in the executive relationship business. She's spent the last 20 years connecting investors and companies in the natural resources and energy industries.

Link: <http://www.planetprofitreport.com/index.php/articles/modern-energy-matchmakers/>