



July 23, 2012

Area Legislators, Candidates, Policymakers Learn About Renewable Energy at MSCC

State legislators, legislative candidates, and policymakers gathered Tuesday, July 17, at Mid-South Community College for “Energy, Jobs & the Economy,” a workshop presented by the Applied Sustainability Center of the University of Arkansas.

The event included “Energy 101 – A Primer for Arkansas Lawmakers and Policymakers;” Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy, and Alternative Fuels panel discussions, and a luncheon presentation by Ken Baker of Walmart. The day ended with a tour of the Marion Berry Renewable Energy Center on MSCC’s North Campus.

“The Arkansas Legislature plays a critical role in the development of a policy and regulatory framework that can create the conditions for economic success through better deployment of our energy resources,” explained Michele Halsell, managing director of the Applied Sustainability Center of the Sam M. Walton College of Business.



“In preparing for the workshop, we consulted with advanced energy experts, manufacturers, business owners, and workforce development specialists. We researched the strategies and policy innovations currently being utilized around the nation so that the information presented in this workshop is current and particularly relevant to Arkansas’ future.”

Halsell pointed out that the state boasts a relative abundance of energy resources that can be leveraged to create jobs and grow our economy, but added “At the same time, Arkansas is an energy intensive state with ample room for improvement on the energy efficiency front.”

Dr. Gibson “Sunny” Morris of Mid-South Community College, who provided the welcome and participated as a Renewable Energy Panel member, said the event focused on the importance of planning for the future. MSCC and fellow members of the Arkansas Delta Training and Education Consortium (ADTEC) are actively involved in renewable energy initiatives.

“There is going to be a major effort to try to get Arkansas’s next General Assembly to put together a comprehensive renewable energy plan,” Morris said. “These workshops were designed to assist current and possibly future legislators in mapping a pathway to become a renewable energy focused state.”

Arkansas is one of only 10 states in the U.S. that does not have such a plan.

Workshop presenters included a variety of experts on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and alternative fuels.

Jim Wimberly of BioEnergy Systems LLC prepared the primer presentation, and Energy Efficiency panelists included Lisa Ferrell, Arkansas Workforce Development; Matt Bell, Viridian; James Hess, TME, Inc.; Ron Hughes, Pulaski Technical College, and Sean Maguire, Johnson Controls.

The Renewable Energy Panel included Kim Randle, Clean Line Energy; Chuck Stewart, Liberty Solar Solutions; Pam Speraw, Sun City Solar, and Wimberly. The Alternative Fuels panel included Morris; Dr. Elizabeth Hood, Arkansas State University; David Baker, Future Fuels; Terry Turner, Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas, and Kelly Volin, Arkansas Energy Office Clean Cities.



Marc Wilson of Mid-South Community College, right, explains how a biofuel microrefinery operates during a tour of the Marion Berry Renewable Energy Center. Participants in the “Energy, Jobs & the Economy” workshop had the opportunity to view the high-tech equipment and facility following the end of the formal presentation.

The nonpartisan Energy, Jobs and the Economy workshops have been offered to allow legislative candidates and current lawmakers time to study the issue and understand how energy policy impacts job creation and the economy. The workshops explored the economic impact and job creation potential in Arkansas of the advanced energy sector, which includes energy efficiency, renewable energy and alternative fuels.

The workshops, conducted at NorthWest Arkansas Community College, Pulaski Technical Institute, MSCC, and Henderson State University, were underwritten, in part, by the Arkansas Advanced Energy Foundation and the Arkansas Energy Office.

Additional workshops are planned for the public and other audiences later in the year.

The next major event at the Marion Berry Renewable Energy Center will be the building dedication on Friday, Aug. 24. Retired First District Congressman Berry and his

family will be in West Memphis to participate in the 10 a.m. ceremony. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend. The \$9 million, 35,120 square foot structure has tremendous potential to help facilitate change in the economic fortunes of the Arkansas Delta.