

# Michael Goforth: 'Project Energy' puts St. Lucie at center of green future

By Michael Goforth

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To paraphrase Vice President Joe Biden regarding an unrelated matter, “This is a big deal.”

For weeks, there had been rumblings of a major announcement coming that would involve alternative energy and the Treasure Coast Research and Education Park.

On Tuesday, St. Lucie County and Fort Pierce officials announced an agreement with the U.S. Department of Energy’s Oak Ridge National Laboratory for a pilot project to demonstrate environmental and economic benefits of sustainable technologies and practices in a “green mile” involving commercial structures, public and educational buildings, and industrial and manufacturing facilities.

Other partners in the project may include the research park, Indian River State College, USDA and the city of Port St. Lucie.

Erick Gill, public information officer for St. Lucie County, was ready with a press release when the time came last week for the announcement of “Project Energy.” He already had rounded up some quotes to demonstrate what a big deal this may be.

From Florida Gov. Charlie Crist: “This is an exciting new opportunity for St. Lucie County and the state of Florida to push forward with emerging opportunities in the green sector.”

From U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, R-Tequesta: “This partnership will help bring much-needed jobs and investments to St. Lucie County. Investing in renewable energy sources is a critical piece of an ‘all-of-the-above’ comprehensive energy solution, and I’m glad to see St. Lucie County leading the way.”

From U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Miramar: “I am very pleased with this announcement. Clearly, this is an exciting opportunity for St. Lucie County and will create much-needed jobs in

Florida.”

From Ed Massey, president of IRSC: “The timing of this partnership couldn’t be better as we are embarking on a new 65,000-square-foot alternative energy center. It’s a great time to align this partnership with those programs at IRSC to provide real-world experience to our students by having top scientists in our classrooms.”

From Fort Pierce Commissioner Eddie Becht: “There are so many ways that we complement one another. Every time we talk, we find another opportunity to create a new partnership. This will be such a wonderful resource for the local governments, educational institutions, research facilities and residents here. I’m very excited about this partnership.”

Probably no one is more excited than St. Lucie County Commissioner Doug Coward, who has spearheaded the green energy revolution in the county which now has garnered national and, more recently, international attention.

The basics of the plan are these, Coward told me last week: Oak Ridge has been working with about 300 “green” companies and testing the efficiency of their products. Now, the energy lab wants to create a “sustainable communities project for the nation” to test the products in an urban environment. Fort Pierce has been selected and the city has proposed a square mile of the city from the downtown westward in which, pending Oak Ridge OK, every building would be retrofitted for energy savings, primarily at the expense of the companies supplying the products, through the county’s solar energy loan program and various available grants.

That “green mile” would be a model nationally, but also would reduce energy costs for government and private property owners and create new, green jobs. And it will attract new investments from green industries wanting to locate in the area and be part of advanced technologies that will be put into practice here.

Many of the details are still being worked out because this may be the first project of its kind in the nation in which so many multiple green technologies will be employed.

But, there’s little wonder why so much attention is being given to it.

As Coward confirmed, “It’s a big deal.”

Follow Goforth’s blog at [tcpalm.com/goforth](http://tcpalm.com/goforth). Contact him at (772) 409-1332 or [michael.goforth@scripps.com](mailto:michael.goforth@scripps.com).



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