

Seminar shows businesses what going green is all about

By **JAMES PALEN**, The Daily Transcript

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A group of more than 30 San Diego business leaders converged Tuesday in Point Loma, where they had a chance to hear the latest developments in the San Diego sustainability movement.

With San Diego looking to take the lead in clean technology and green innovation and practice, sustainability was chosen to be part of the Third Annual Hot Topics Seminar, hosted Tuesday by **Swenson Advisors LLP**.

Two of the five speakers at the seminar spoke of the pervasiveness of sustainability or clean technology and how that could benefit San Diego businesses. It was the first time Steve Austin, managing partner at Swenson, decided to include speakers from the greener side of the lawn, so to speak.

"I think the future of business development is in the clean-tech arena," Austin said, adding that he felt it necessary to invite speakers on sustainability because he firmly believes San Diego is "well-positioned to be the Mecca of clean energy."

Irene Stillings, executive director for the California Center for Sustainable Energy and the keynote speaker at Tuesday's seminar, couldn't agree more.

Highlighting San Diego's more than 700 clean-tech companies and two solar energy manufacturing plants, Stillings spoke of how San Diego has continued its upward climb in sustainability.

"Solar installs have increased -- and despite difficult economic times," Stillings said.

CCSE has grown from 35 employees two years ago to 60 today. Despite the growing awareness, Stillings is on a mission to keep California innovative and explain her belief that businesses must stay on top of sustainability to remain competitive in the coming years.

"By the time you catch the wave," Stillings said, "it's too late. You have to be ahead."

Using buzzwords like "energy independence," "CFL" and "LED," Stillings, along with **SG Biofuels** Chief Financial Officer J.D. Davids, gave listeners a new perspective of San Diego -- one some of them never knew existed.

"It helps me for my business just to hear the term 'clean-tech,'" said Kent Schumann, president of Oceanside's **SlingStone IT**. "I wasn't aware of how active it was in San Diego."

Schumann had never heard of the Jatropha, a plant that grows in the sub-tropics and produces an oil that companies like SG Biofuels have been able to refine into useable fuel. According to Davids, SG Biofuels has the world's largest Jatropha germplasm library and is expected to lead the way in reducing the price of the oil to just \$32 per barrel through its cultivation technology.

Though Stillings and Davids spoke largely of how the environment could benefit from green technology, there was one other thing Schumann took from the seminar: how going green may actually help his bottom line.

"From a purely selfish standpoint (of making money), that's valuable information to have," Schumann said.

Send your comments to James.Palen@sddt.com.