

April 18, 2009

Engineer: Economic incentive to go green

Discussion at Wilkes University focuses on how environmental consciousness can pay off.

By [Rory Sweeney rsweeney@timesleader.com](mailto:rsweeney@timesleader.com) Staff Writer

WILKES-BARRE – Professionals and concerned citizens met at Wilkes University on Thursday evening to discuss how green ingredients could heat up today's cold economic soup.

A few dozen people listened as an environmental-leaning architect and engineer, a renewable-energy developer, a representative from a local economic-growth organization, an environmental advocate and a rabbi explained how going green environmentally can generate financial success.

Michelle Dempsey, who runs the Scranton-based DXDempsey engineering and architecture firm, said her clients aren't simply thinking about a greener environment.

"Green to them is I want it to pay itself back. ... It has to make financial sense, too," she said.

The financial incentives of green-building principles have landed her Fidelity Bank as a repeat customer. When she first suggested the concept, she had to explain it to one of the bank's representatives, and the cost savings eventually sold them.

"Now we're looking at building another branch," she said, noting that two branches are receiving energy-saving renovations. "They're in; they want to see the same operating cost reductions."

Sponsored by the Blue Green Alliance, a collaboration of environmental and job-creation advocacy groups, the town-hall meeting was intended to explain how a green economy can save both the environment and jobs in traditional industries, such as labor, service and manufacturing.

One example is the 139-acre solar-energy plant that John Curtis and his Green Energy Capital firm want to construct near Jim Thorpe. With construction and operation, the facility would create about \$3.1 million in wages through almost 90 full-time and part-time jobs.

"More wealth will be created in the new-energy space than will ever be created in the Internet," he said, quoting a renewable-energy venture capitalist.

But while there may be money to make for some, there's more to be saved by others, according to Joe Calore, who works at the Commission on Economic Opportunity in Wilkes-Barre. His organization provides energy-saving weatherization for the homes of low-income families. The best reasons to work toward a greener economy may not even be in the discussion yet, according to Rabbi Daniel Swartz, who leads Temple Hesed in Scranton.

"We've been living this giant Ponzi scheme where we say we know at some point someone is going to have to pay for the resources we're using," he said. "Like any Ponzi scheme, eventually you get caught. Eventually you see that you've been trying to pass on to somebody else the costs of making yourself rich."