

## **Biannual meeting helps attract venture capital funding**

Orion Energy Systems' lights are all about conserving energy. Best Energies' system for creating fuel from organic matter is all about producing energy in a new way.

The two Wisconsin companies have one thing in common, though. Both will be among 20 emerging companies making five-minute presentations to venture capitalists at the Cleantech Forum today in San Francisco.

The forum is held twice a year by Cleantech Venture Network LLC, which has more than 1,300 affiliate investor members around the world. It has helped companies raise more than \$700 million since 2002, organizers say.

Companies with clean technologies - those that reduce or eliminate environmental impact and encompass everything from alternative forms of energy generation to water purification and nanotechnology - raised a record \$3.6 billion of venture capital in 2006, a 45% increase over 2005, according to Cleantech Venture Network.

"It's a real hot area right now, there's a lot of interest in clean technology," said Scott Button, managing director at Venture Investors in Madison.

Leaders in certain so-called cleantech segments already are emerging, according to Cleantech Venture Network's annual venture capital report. Florida is emerging as an energy storage center. British Columbia leads in fuel cells. California and Massachusetts are strongest in solar energy, nanotechnology and energy-related information technology.

Wisconsin has scattered companies doing interesting things, but needs to build a stronger infrastructure and better partnerships to compete in cleantech, said Masood Akhtar, president of CleanTech Partners Inc. He founded the Madison group to help reduce energy consumption in Wisconsin by supporting early-stage companies in this area and by helping businesses become more energy efficient.

There also is potential in places such as the federally funded Forest Products Laboratory in Madison and the cellulosic ethanol project at the Flambeau River Biorefinery in Park Falls, Akhtar said.

Plymouth-based Orion Energy, a privately held company with 185 employees, makes energy-efficient lighting technology that's popular in warehouses and

factories for the nation's largest companies. In August, the company received a \$4.5 million investment from Expansion Capital Partners of New York and San Francisco.

Madison-based Best Energies Inc., a privately held company with 32 employees, was formed in August through the acquisition of Cashton-based Generation International LLC and Somersby, Australia-based Biomass Energy Services and Technology.

The company's first project is a biodiesel plant that is under construction in Cashton, which the company hopes will produce about 8 million gallons a year of biodiesel from soybean oil beginning next year.

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