

TransTech Business conference helps boost start-up companies

BY JIM BISSETT

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The next big thing in the energy arena just may have gotten its launch this week in Morgantown.

Nearly \$50,000 in start-up money was awarded to nine fledgling companies during the TransTech Business Development conference on Friday — and Carl Irwin, the WVU energy researcher who helped organize the event, said he expects the payday to go places.

That's because those dollars are multiplied by brain power, he said.

And such brain power, he said, means the whole planet can ultimately benefit, since all the companies involved are working to move the world away from fossil fuels and toward lower-carbon emission alternatives.

"We need to advance these ideas," Irwin said of the gathering that finished up Friday at the Waterfront Place Hotel and Conference Center. This was the fourth year for the gathering.

"We're looking at good people with good ideas, and they're working in the research labs and even their garages," he said. "The world is changing, and we need them."

Not as much as Morgan Hager and Randall Gabriel needed them, the pair said, laughing.

They received a \$2,500 in-kind research award that they'll use on a prototype engine they developed through their company, Carbon Innovations, of Athens, Ohio.

Their engine will use

biomass technology — the converting of any carbon-based materials such as coal or coke — to provide hot water and electricity.

"We've been at this for three years," Gabriel said. "Now we can get to work on the production. We're already looking at machine shops to get started."

"We had the prototype," Hager said. "After that, the question was, 'How are we going to build it?'"

Companies had to pitch their ideas before a panel of energy experts and other leaders in the industry.

Winning \$10,000 awards were Maven Machines Inc., H Quest Vanguard and Hadron Technologies.

Lumishield Technologies Inc. and Multi-Functional Proppants earned \$5,000 apiece.

Fairmont Brine Processing earned a \$2,500 award and General Graphene took home a \$1,000 award for its work.

One Oak Systems also earned a \$2,500 in-kind technical assistance award for its work.

The winning companies are developing technologies ranging from wireless headsets that can detect if long-haul truckers are drowsy or distracted, to technologies that use electromagnetic energy to convert fossil and bio feedstock to synthetic crude oil.

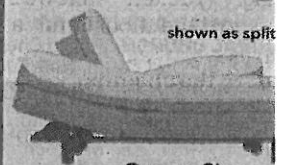
Companies from across West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Tennessee and California came to Morgantown for the conference.

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