

'Green' Grows in Broward

With renewable energy sources, LEED certification and sustainable growth opportunities, signs point to an emerging environmental industry.

By Richard Westlund

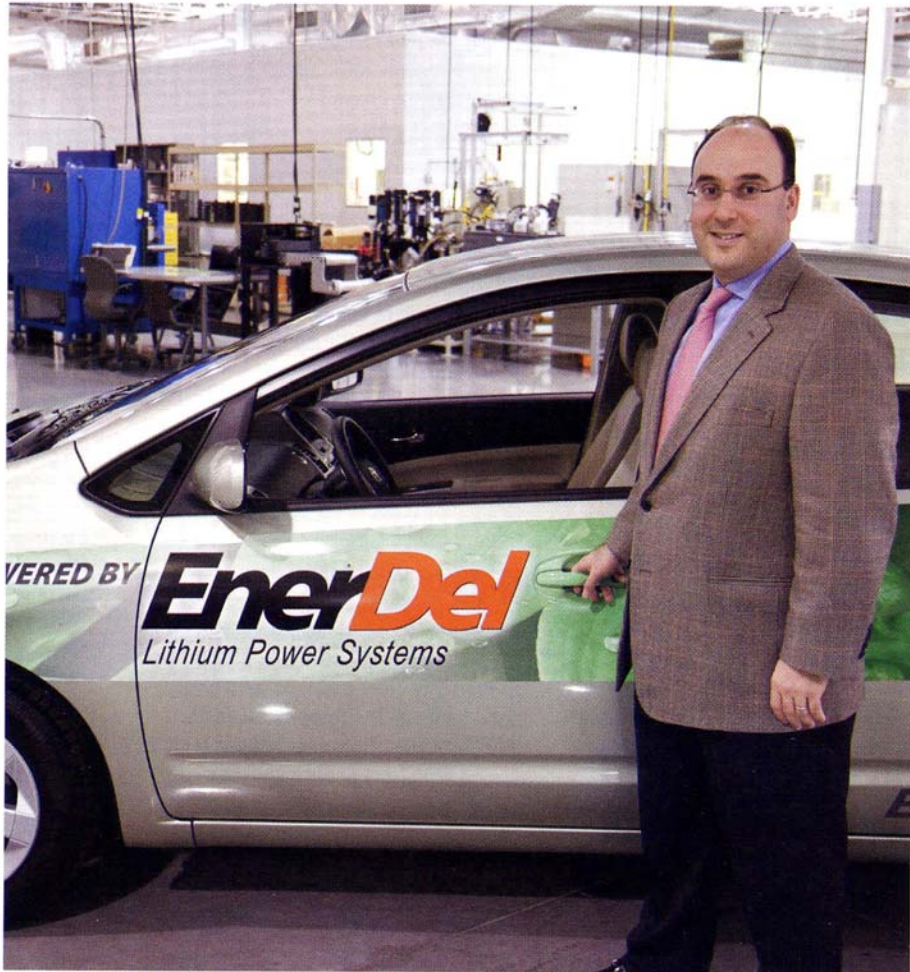
As the world's automakers scramble to build high-mileage hybrid vehicles, a Fort Lauderdale company is charging ahead in the race to develop a next-generation battery. In December, Ener1 Inc. passed a key milestone in becoming the first company to successfully integrate a lithium-ion battery into an operating hybrid electric vehicle (HEV).

"We are excited about the market opportunity, and expect to bring the lithium-ion battery to market by the end of 2008," says Charles Gassenheimer, Ener1's chairman. "We believe electrification of the automobile is critical to achieving new U.S. mileage standards and reducing our dependence on foreign oil."

Ener1 also is developing commercial fuel cells that produce (rather than store) electricity, nanotechnology-based materials and manufacturing processes for batteries and other applications. "We expect to grow our Broward employee base significantly in the next year," he says of the 35-person company.

Like Ener1, a growing list of Broward companies and professional firms are responding to increasing demand for "green" products and services. Plumbing companies are stocking more water-conserving shower, sink and toilet products, for instance. Meanwhile, architectural, engineering and law firms and construction companies are developing in-house expertise under the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program.

"In my practice, I saw the handwriting on the wall," says real estate attorney Paul D'Arelli, a shareholder in the Fort Lauderdale office of Greenberg Traurig LLP. Within a year of becoming a LEED-accredited professional last February,



Charles Gassenheimer, chairman, Ener1 Inc.

D'Arelli was hired to advise the developers of three large-scale LEED developments on risk management, marketing, lease, design and other legal issues. "We are also helping corporate clients with their internal sustainability initiatives, such as greening their supply chains," he adds. "As for me, my zoning practice was basically Broward — now it's national."

A similar process is under way at Dorsky Hodgson Parrish Yue Architects, whose Fort Lauderdale office now has two LEED-accredited professionals. "Today,

everyone is focusing on the issue of sustainability," says Victor Yue, managing partner. "We've seen growing demand for energy-efficient mixed-use projects, and some financial institutions are also requiring LEED certification now. That's a big step in the market, as it means older buildings will become obsolete very quickly."

Although higher cost factors have slowed the adoption of LEED standards, Yue adds that the gap is narrowing quickly. At Promenade at Coconut Creek, a town center project under construction, a design

for basic LEED certification added only 3 percent to the overall construction costs, he says. "You can incorporate LEED features that cost very little money but have a high impact, such as preferred parking for bicycles or hybrid vehicles, in the project plan."

Since its founding in 2005, The Chappell Group Inc., a Pompano Beach environmental consulting firm, has already built a long list of clients, including Broward County and Port Everglades. Vice President Tyler Chappell says the firm is advising on

more than 100 wetlands preservation and mitigation projects throughout Florida, primarily in the hotel, resort and marina markets.

"We see growth for our firm in the next year, since the marine-related real estate market remains strong," he says. "Most developers are aware of the environmental responsibilities that come with their projects. Our multidisciplinary approach helps them achieve their goals while promoting long-term sustainability."

On a much larger scale, Fort Lauderdale-

based construction services company Moss & Associates is committed to green building projects and practices, according to CEO Bob L. Moss. "We want to be seen as the experts, while supporting the community," he says.

Kevin Denton, a LEED-accredited professional and a senior project manager for Moss, notes that Florida property owners and developers have become far more interested in LEED certification in the past year. "It took a long time to catch on, but interest is growing quickly, especially in the public sector," he says. "Owners realize it reduces operating expenses and provides a marketing tool to help them sell their building."

By the last quarter of 2007, Moss & Associates had completed \$108 million in green projects, with another \$133 million under construction and \$106 million in design. To support client demand 15 percent of its operational workforce is training to become LEED accredited. "That's a huge commitment on our part," Moss says, "but having well-qualified people helps create new business opportunities for our company." ■



Victor Yue, managing partner, Dorsky Hodgson Parrish Yue Architects