

# S.C.'s hydrogen assets gaining national notice

by MIKE FITTS  
 mfitts@scbiznews.com

South Carolina has formidable assets on hydrogen power and fuel cell research, and people from around the country are noticing, according to the state's top advocates in the research field.

Columbia's hosting of the National Hydrogen Association conference from March 30 to April 3 was seen by local groups as a chance to show the nascent industry what the state has to offer – and to show locals the strength of South Carolina's potential.

National experts have noticed that South Carolina's focus on hydrogen and the scientific firepower it has attracted, S.C. Research Authority CEO Bill Mahoney said on the convention floor.

Mahoney noted that a U.S. Department of Energy spokesperson at a recent industry event listed South Carolina as among the top tier of states in hydrogen research, and put the state on par with California as the two leaders. California has many more public-private resources, Mahoney said, but South Carolina's full set of innovation tools, from research to entrepreneurship, put it right alongside its larger competitor.

States such as Ohio and Connecticut have a lot of money to throw around, Mahoney said, but South Carolina's mix of assets, from Aiken to Columbia to Clemson, and its small-state sense of focus make it very competitive. Other states have seen competition creep in among their varying assets, while South Carolina's different centers of knowledge have been content to watch each other improve, Mahoney said.

## S.C.'s broad look at hydrogen

California is focused on rolling out cars and hydrogen fueling stations, while South Carolina is working on a variety of uses and the whole hydrogen production cycle, said Shannon Baxter-Clemmons, executive director of the S.C. Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Alliance. "We're working in the same direction, but not necessarily competing

for the exact same companies," she said.

Convention visitors got the message loud and clear about South Carolina's enthusiasm, according to Keith A. Spitznagel, senior vice president for marketing at Logan Energy. The local displays of interest in hydrogen, from billboards to a big turnout on public day, were "very impressive," Spitznagel said.

Logan Energy, based outside Atlanta, is involved in the fuel-cell backup power demonstration at Fort Jackson, so Spitznagel was familiar with what South Carolina and Columbia offer on hydrogen. But he thought that first-time visitors likely got an eyeful of South Carolina's potential.

The South Carolina effort, with tours locally and to other fuel-cell locales around the state showed off a lot more than just the convention hall, he said.

Numerous South Carolina visitors to the Logan Energy booth talked about the state's potential, and made it clear that the focus is on new businesses and jobs, Spitznagel said.

It likely will be months before South Carolina has a measurable read on the economic effectiveness of the hydrogen conference, at least in one important metric: new investments.

## Recession slows investment

Several key players in S.C.'s hydrogen efforts said they talked with visiting business executives about potential investments in the Palmetto State, but those talks are likely to take awhile to come to fruition, especially in the current investment slowdown.

Thomas E. Mutchler of Air Products and Chemicals said that South Carolina showed off its strengths well at the conference.

Mutchler is general manager for worldwide equipment for Air Products of Allentown, Pa., an industrial provider of hydrogen. The conference allowed South Carolina to show the focus of its university efforts, legislative support and research strength, he said. "I commend the folks in



South Carolina for seeing beyond the as-is to what can be for this country.”

The academic firepower that South Carolina has attracted in this field adds authority to the efforts here, Mutchler said. Those voices bring more credibility than those who simply are trying to sell products or raise capital.

California is doing great things, too, Mutchler said, “but it’s not the only place where advancements will happen.”

Organizers were pleased with the event, especially when more than 2,000

people came to check out the displays and ride in hydrogen-powered vehicles on the day it was open to the public. The previous top attendance for public day was between 500 and 600 people, NHA spokesman Patrick Serfass said.

“There’s been an amazing turnout in Columbia,” Serfass said amid the crowds on public day. Companies are interested in recent scientific advances, Serfass said, but they truly are focused on the possibilities to deploy the technology. <sup>85</sup>