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We all need to make a change
Upstate offers glimpse into energy efficient future

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Ever try to read by fire or candlelight? We needed something better. Thomas Edison came up with a carbon filament light bulb.

We needed a quicker way to talk to people at a distance. Quicker than racing out the front door, leaping into a buggy and driving across town. Alexander Graham Bell filed a patent. We got telephones.

It's that kind of thing that's underway with regard to climate change.

No, not every single living person in the entire United States is convinced that the atmosphere is warming and that human activity -- driving cars, for instance -- is contributing to that.

Advertisement Sixteen percent have their doubts, a New York Times/CBS News poll found last month. Sixteen percent.

For the really large majority of us, 84 percent, that question has been settled.

Next question: What do we do about it?

Certain businesses haven't been drumming their fingers, waiting around to watch this particular back-and-forth play out. They had ideas. They saw markets. They acted.

Steven Smith has some examples to offer. Smith is executive director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy.

He was in town last week as the second speaker of the Climate Change Speaker Series sponsored by Upstate Forever, Furman University's Committee on Environmental Sustainability, Furman's Year of the Environment Committee and Carolina Climate Network.

Smith brought up ethanol and biodiesel fuel. "Greenville has more ethanol and biodiesel pumps than any other city in the state," he said. Thanks to the Spinx Company Inc.


On its Web site, the Palmetto State Clean Fuels Coalition lists 67 stations selling E85 (ethanol) and biodiesel fuels. Not all belong to Spinx, but all but 20 are in the Upstate.

In fact, South Carolina has more stations selling biodiesel than any other state, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

And only seven states have more stations selling E85. They're in the Midwest.

Smith brought up the wind turbines that General Electric makes in Greenville.

The American Wind Energy Association says in 2007 the U.S. will be generating enough wind electricity to

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"displace" 19 million tons of carbon dioxide, the leading greenhouse gas.

In other words if that same electricity were produced by traditional means -- coal, natural gas or oil -- 19 million tons is how much CO2 would be released into the atmosphere.

GE entered the wind business in 2002, its Web site notes. Just three years later, in 2005, the corporation installed 1,346 turbines worldwide and its wind revenue exceeded \$2 billion.

Smith had other examples. Hydrogen powered cars, for instance. BMW has a hydrogen hybrid, he noted.

Featured in Tuesday's New York Times: Ray Anderson, of Vinings, Ga., whose company has cut its use of fossil fuels 45 percent and its contribution to landfills by 80 percent. Sales are up 49 percent.

Anderson's company makes carpet tiles.

Business alone can't fix things.

Homes produce 17 percent of greenhouse gases. Transportation, 28 percent.

We all have our parts.
