

Green Horizons

Experts see local job opportunities emerging in renewable energy and conservation sectors.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY ARTHUR ZACZKIEWICZ

As businesses and consumers slog through the economic downturn, prospects for growth in jobs and housing remain dim. But greenbuilding requirements for public facilities and a 600,000-job creation effort from President Obama that includes green retrofitting of public buildings and creating demand for energy efficiency are shining a light on the green jobs front. This bodes well for the Hudson Valley and the Capital District, which are well positioned as key players in an emerging green economy. Experts see the economy transforming into a green one, but the change will be slow and intertwined with the current economy.

The region is especially appealing for green business development thanks to a vast inventory of existing infrastructure that can be easily redeveloped (such as TechCity in Kingston; see story on page 22); a skilled workforce; tax breaks and incentives; and a growing, regional incubator of clean energy technology. This includes initiatives at SUNY and other centers in Ulster, Orange, Rockland, Dutchess, and Sullivan counties to expand and/or create a complete schedule of classes in solar, wind, and geothermal technologies.

On a federal level, Congressman Maurice Hinchey's office has worked tirelessly for more than a decade to promote the region's suitability for green development. In addition to working with The Solar Energy Consortium (TSEC) in Kingston, Hinchey's office is also wooing more than a half-dozen clean energy firms in hopes that they will relocate to the Hudson Valley. The strategies also include brokering deals between state officials and private businesses to create demand for clean energy while lining up incentives and assistance via NYSERDA and the Empire State Development Corp.

Meanwhile, the green jobs keep springing up. For example, in April, General Electric Co. (with a \$15 million grant from New York State) announced plans to build a high-tech battery manufacturing plant outside Albany, which will generate about 350 jobs. The batteries will be used in GE's hybrid locomotives.

In Kingston, EarthKind Energy Inc.'s recent relocation to TechCity to expand its business will add 30 jobs, keeping TechCity's goal of 300 jobs created by year's end on track.

Prism Solar Technologies has also recently announced new jobs in the pipeline. Prism Solar, which just moved into a facility in Highland that once served as an apple-packing plant and was most recently owned by Plasmaco for developing plasma display technology,



is bringing to market a patented solar PV technology called the "Holographic Planar Concentrator"—an optical film designed to vastly improve the capture and use of sunlight in solar PV panels. The company sells solar modules and the HPC material to other module makers. Prism says it plans to spin off the HPC material making, which will create about 80 jobs in the next year or so.

Melissa Everett, executive director of Sustainable Hudson Valley, says the areas likely to see the most action from the evolving and growing green economy will be the energy efficiency, renewable energy, green building, sustainable transportation, and green policy and regulation sectors. "There are many possible scales for future green jobs, and it will vary depending on how economic development is done," Everett says.

At a tour of green businesses in late May, organized by MoveOn.org in support of the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, a clear picture emerged as to how a green economy can evolve. The tour included a stop at Hudson Valley Clean Energy in Rhinebeck, which offers solar, wind, and geothermal solutions for commercial, residential, and municipal applications.

The tour featured a business that has transformed itself into a pioneer in green building products: Kingston Block & Masonry Supply, which produces concrete masonry units (CMUs)—or "cement blocks." Here, Louis Grasso Jr., managing partner and a LEED-Accredited Professional (AP), tells a compelling tale.

"It's simple," Grasso says in a no-nonsense New York accent. "The bottom line is that public projects must be LEED certified to get funding. So how do you raise your LEED credits? By using recycled materials."

In this case, recycled concrete is fused with recycled glass, binding it into one tough block called a "Pozzotive" CMU Grasso developed last year. Many

What's Available?

What types of jobs are in demand in the green economy sector? A recent random search of job postings in New York found these:

- **SOLAR PV ENGINEER**
- **R&D RENEWABLE ENERGY PROFESSIONAL**
- **SOLAR PV REGIONAL SALES MANAGER**
- **ENERGY AUDITOR**
- **SMARTGRID SYSTEMS ENGINEER**
- **LEED ENGINEERS**
- **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT MANAGER**
- **CLEAN ENERGY ASSOCIATE**
- **GREEN MARKETING PROFESSIONAL**

“The bottom line is that public projects must be LEED certified to get funding. So how do you raise your LEED credits? By using recycled materials.”

—Louis Grasso Jr.,

Kingston Block & Masonry Supply

of Grasso’s customers are builders in New York City using Pozzotive CMUs in new construction. The recycled concrete also happens to come from the city. “We’re rebuilding New York with New York recyclables,” he adds.

Pozzotive accounts for 30 percent of Grasso’s business, but his goal is to make it 100 percent. “And we have 45 employees,” adds. “We’ve laid no one off. In this economy, that’s job growth.”

Tom Sahagian, energy division manager at Power Concepts LLC, says green industry segments such as bamboo flooring, wind turbines, and solar panels will likely gain traction in the region over time, “but they will not be the engine for the greatest opportunities.” Energy efficiency—in commercial, residential, and industrial buildings, will be the driver, Sahagian says.

Regarding solar and wind, Sahagian says the economics are not that great at the moment. Adoption has not reached a critical tipping point yet, which is why there’s more interest (and investment) in energy conservation.

Patrice Courtney Strong, coordinator of Mid-Hudson Energy Smart Communities, says in New York State the greatest opportunities are for “home performance professionals [such as] home energy auditors.” Of course, Strong and other experts want the solar, wind, and geothermal segments to thrive. “It’s not clear, however, how many of these professionals our region can absorb in the next, say, 10 to 15 years,” Strong says. The math, at the moment, doesn’t add up from a consumer-adoption perspective. A home solar installation retails for about \$40,000; with state and federal incentives, the cost drops to \$14,000, which is still out of reach for many consumers, Strong and others say.

“On the other hand, with Prism Solar Technologies and other companies at work driving down the cost of solar, the picture could soon change,” Strong adds. ■

Resource List

Interested in exploring green jobs? Although many companies have put hiring on hold, there are still opportunities for skilled laborers, managers, and others. Here’s a list of websites to get you started:

GREENBUSINESSCAREERS.COM

ScheinMedia’s online recruiting service is updated daily with green real estate and building-related jobs.
greenbusinesscareers.com

GREEN JOBS NETWORK

Connects people seeking jobs that focus on environmental and social responsibility with available opportunities and resources.
new-york.greenjobs.net

THE BLUE GREEN ALLIANCE

A national partnership of labor unions and environmental organizations “dedicated to expanding the number and quality of jobs in the green economy,” includes the United Steelworkers union, the Sierra Club, CWA, NRDC, LIUNA and the SEIU.
bluegreenalliance.org

GREEN FOR ALL

A nonprofit that has some good stories for anyone looking for insights about green-collar jobs and opportunities in a green economy.
greenforall.org



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: PRISM SOLAR TECHNOLOGIES INC., LOCATED IN HIGHLAND, HAS DEVELOPED A THIN-FILM MATERIAL THAT INCREASES THE EFFICIENCY OF SOLAR PV MODULES; AT KINGSTON BLOCK & MASONRY SUPPLY IN KINGSTON, THIS MACK TRUCK TOUTS THE CEMENT BLOCK MAKER’S SUSTAINABILITY MESSAGE; AT THE MAIN STREET SOLAR STORE IN SAUGERTIES, A BUSINESS THAT SELLS SOLAR-POWERED DEVICES AS WELL AS EDUCATES CONSUMERS ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF SOLAR POWER, THIS WELCOME MAT GREETSS SHOPPERS.

OPPOSITE: LOUIS GRASSO, JR., MANAGING PARTNER OF KINGSTON BLOCK & MASONRY SUPPLY, DISCUSSES THE BENEFITS OF HIS RECENTLY PATENTED CEMENT BLOCK THAT FEATURES RECYCLED CEMENT FUSED WITH POWDERED RECYCLED GLASS.