

AzRISE: A Big Tent For Solar Energy Development

AzRISE celebrated its inaugural year last Friday morning with a poster session and breakfast that highlighted the institute's wide-ranging efforts to develop and promote solar energy.

The exhibits included 28 posters from 15 departments highlighting AzRISE and UA activities in the areas of research and development, economic and policy studies, and education and outreach.

But the institute isn't just about UA, said Ardeth Barnhart, co-director of AzRISE, the Arizona Research Institute for Solar Energy.

"We set out to put together a statewide collaboration," she told those gathered for the event in the student union's South Ballroom. "So we're working with NAU and ASU. We're working with all the major utilities in the state, as well as with the economic development community and the governor's office. We have put a lot of effort into bringing everyone to the table."

AzRISE Director Joe Simmons echoed this big-tent outlook. "One of the principal philosophies at AzRISE is that we're totally open," he said. "Anyone who wants to work with us is absolutely welcome. In fact, we could use more help."

This inclusive attitude has allowed AzRISE to undertake a large number of projects during its first year, said Tamarack Little, who represented Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords at the event.

Many of those working with AzRISE are motivated by the sentiment expressed in Giffords' remarks that Little read to the group: "The time for solar power is at hand and you are at the forefront of transforming it from an idea into a reality."

This dedication to the solar-energy cause is why AzRISE has more than 60 students involved in its programs, Simmons noted. "This is incredible because our program isn't wealthy enough to support that many students. So what's happening is a lot of faculty are volunteering their time and effort to be involved in solar energy."

UA's Eller College of Management also has joined AzRISE in drafting solar energy policy recommendations for the state, Barnhart said.

Beginning next year, the Eller College also will be doing economic analysis of solar energy technology. "This is really important because economics can help inform technology," Barnhart said. "And that, in turn helps us derive better policy recommendations for the state."

"The reasons for working in solar energy have intensified," said Leslie Tolbert, vice president for research, graduate studies and economic development. "The downturn

in the economy reminds us that as a state we need to diversity our economy and also as a nation we need to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.” Solar energy will play a large part in the field of renewable energy, and Arizona is poised to play a leadership role, she added.

The 28 posters at the event covered a broad range of research in areas such as photovoltaics, solar-energy systems, energy storage, solar houses, and solar-powered cars.

AzRISE will continue its efforts to make Arizona a leader in solar energy development by sponsoring a solar energy summit in January, Barnhart said. The meeting will bring together legislators, members of the business community, and educators to determine the ways in which solar-energy-related activities can help the state emerge as a leader in the field.