GEA Project Showcase Presents Geothermal Industry to DC Community

By Leslie Blodgett – Geothermal Energy Association

The Geothermal Energy Association along with geothermal leaders and experts from around the nation offered a unique Geothermal Energy Project Showcase on May 6. Geothermal companies presented a virtual tour of new geothermal power plants and projects under development to a standing-room-only audience of renewable energy industry members, financiers, Congressional representatives, international delegates, students, and community members at the Newseum in Washington, DC.

The Newseum was a beautiful venue with high ceilings and glass walls that offered clear views of the Capital building, the Washington monument, and other symbols of the town hosting the event.

The program encompassed geothermal power and heating projects across the U.S., with video footage and interviews, panel discussions, and featured speakers representing a booming industry, as a March 2009 report by GEA identifies a total of 126 projects under development with the potential to put 5,500 MW of new geothermal power on line.

Each presenting company was given 15 minutes to introduce their projects and show video footage. Screenings from Gold level sponsors Ormat Technologies, Enel North America, and Pratt & Whitney Power Systems showcased innovative technologies at geothermal power plants that have freshly come on line. Nevada Geothermal Power and the Oregon Institute of Technology showed projects under development. ThermaSource, Inc., POWER Engineers, Western GeoPower, U.S. Navy's Geothermal Program, and Raser Technologies also presented project footage to an attentive crowd.

"The accelerated pace of geothermal development is stunning," one participant said. "The video tours were well made and effectively communicated the interest and excitement surrounding one of the most important options for renewable energy today."

A panel of leading experts reported that upward trends in the industry show only a small portion of the actual power lying beneath the surface of the Earth. Dr. Lisa Shevenell, Director of the Great Basin Center for Geothermal Energy at University of Nevada Reno called recent USGS estimates of geothermal potential seriously flawed and reported that Nevada alone could exceed what USGS projected for the entire nation. Projects already under development in Nevada could produce as much as 39% of the state's current power needs, she said.

SMU Geothermal Laboratory Coordinator and Staff Researcher Maria Richards, who spoke on geothermal and coproduction, reported new geothermal projects moving forward in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Texas and the Southeast have large areas of geothermal resource potential that have been largely ignored in the past, but companies are now moving forward with plans for exploration and development, she noted. Mapping produced by Richards and Professor David Blackwell has proven that many

existing oil and gas wells in these and other mid-continent states reach shallower depths with temperatures from 200 to 300°F, hot enough for a binary power plant.

Professor Jeff Tester, author of a well-known 2006 study on the Future of Geothermal Energy, captured the excitement on the enormity of the Earth's energy potential. "Just a few percent of the potentially recoverable energy could meet our needs," he explained. Current development and advanced technology represent a continuum of steadily increasing development, he remarked, while the eventual goal is to increase production dramatically using EGS, or engineered geothermal systems. Dan Reicher of Google.org illustrated the same point using Google Earth technology to visit project sites where EGS technologies are underway.

Bernie Karl of Chena Hot Springs urged the crowd to make geothermal energy a priority for the sake of the nation and future generations. "We are addicted to energy imports, and for the sake of our children, we need to break the addiction," Karl emphatically pointed out.

GEA also recently participated in the 12th Annual Congressional Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency EXPO + Forum on May 14. More than 400 representatives from various trade associations, renewable energy companies, utilities, and congressional committees rubbed elbows over the numerous displays from organizations in the renewable energy industry. The video presentations from the Geothermal Project Showcase were displayed on a continuous loop and were a popular feature of GEA's exhibit. Genuine interest in geothermal was prevalent among expo goers. Representatives from the congressional research service, the environmental protection agency, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Constellation Energy, and even Ralph Nader spoke with GEA representatives at length. Additionally, Senator Mark Udall of Colorado and Representative Jay Inslee of Washington among other Congressional Representatives spoke regarding the need for the increased development of renewables.

Showcase presentations and videos will soon be available on the GEA Web site, www.geo-energy.org. GEA's next workshop will be a U.S. Geothermal Finance and Development Workshop in Seattle, Washington on June 3.