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Local students tackle global energy challenge

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Alternative -- or so-called "green" -- energy has in recent years become a hot topic among politicians, global media, Internet bloggers and technology wonks. As the world faces the challenge of meeting ever-growing energy needs with limited resources, alternative mindsets clearly are vital to the process of developing alternative energy technologies.

There is no shortage of information available on all subjects green. But as with all new technology, fact often is laced with speculative fiction, and some concepts will evolve while others are discarded. This process is not confined to government and corporate laboratories and universities. It's genesis is in the curiosity and enthusiasm of young people exposed to the sciences in our schools -- students who one day will be involved in research and development of cutting-edge energy technology.

Key West High School physics instructor Josh Clearman is doing his part to stimulate that interest. Clearman's alternative energy class is among the first wave of students delving seriously into green energy development at the high school level.

Clearman is teaching his students more than the practical aspects of alternative power sources -- he also is teaching them how to think creatively -- and sometimes unconventionally -- about sustainable power. Just as the introduction of computers in the classroom has changed the way children learn and think, he hopes with this curriculum to change how students relate to the world around them.

Clearman is a hands-on instructor, and it shows in his teaching style. Rather than exploring green energy through study of work compiled by others, his students are building and maintaining energy systems at the school. For the past two years, his students have been producing bio-diesel -- and in doing so been able to determine the viability of fuel from both a practical and economic standpoint.

Their newest endeavor deals with drawing energy from ocean breezes. The project will provide a quantifiable, real-world demonstration of the practicality -- or impracticality -- of wind power in the Florida Keys. Once up and running, wind turbines will supply power to the high school and generate data the students will evaluate.

Once the wind-to-energy project is operating, Clearman hopes to expand the scope of student research into the realm of solar power.

Clearman and motivated educators like him across the country are planting the seeds for

a greener future, which also is a more secure and sustainable future. We are proud of the role he and his students are playing on the global stage.

-- *The Citizen*

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