

## Will this area become clean-tech showcase?



Senator Klobuchar spoke to the crowd attending the meeting at Meredee's in Chisago City. Small photo is Bengt-Erik Lofgren, from Sweden. He founded AFAB, a consortium of clean tech companies and experts.



products.

It won't happen overnight; but many local leaders are coming together on the idea of developing a carbon-neutral business park in the Lindstrom-Chisago City area-- and taking the green concept even further-- constructing a local electric and heat generating plant that will run on renewable sources.

U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar made a stop in Chisago City last week, where she heard from many businesspersons, local elected officials and a chairman of the Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce who resides in Lindstrom. Klobuchar spoke of federal initiatives in the pipeline to incentive-ize green projects and she heard of what this area has to offer.

While the federal government has a role to play it will only be a strong level of interest locally that will allow the project to happen.

February 21 a contingent met at the community room of the Library and listened to a program by Bengt-Erik Lofgren, founder of a consortium in Sweden, AFAB, which has exported clean tech innovations since 1984.

Lofgren said Sweden is 15 years ahead of the United States in clean energy. He has about 28 businesses ready to get to work here and build a heat/electric plant or install the infrastructure or instruct others on installation. Lofgren said Sweden has a "heating district" operating in almost every city getting fuel from "waste" agricultural products and other renewables like sawdust.

Lofgren said in Sweden the GNP grew (since 1990) by 40 percent while the country's CO2 output was cut by nine percent. He said the experience in Sweden is, "there has been no sacrifice" in jobs or industrialization, and productivity has actually improved not been curtailed. In Sweden the government assesses penalties on polluters and uses the revenue to support green programs and technology.

Depending on the BTU demand the Chisago Lakes Area could easily design and build a plant that could certainly support a bio-business park, and even support local towns' heating and electric needs, Lofgren explained. Combinations of technologies are effective, such as solar and burning ag residues and wood by-

Lofgren said his firm is working in the city of Rockford, Illinois at this time and he'd be thrilled to start a similar effort in the Chisago Lakes Area. The ideal way to proceed would be to make the Chisago Lakes area "a showplace" of clean technology processes and do a comprehensive project supplying renewable

heat/power to residential as well as to a bio-business park-- which then makes this area a magnet for carbon-neutral business, Lofgren stated.

Mike Davis, chair of the Swedish-American Chamber, added that this region has always been proud of its Scandinavian history but the direct connections are fading as generations pass. Davis said contemporary relationships such as this green initiative and technology sharing will breathe new life into the existing Scandinavia-Chisago Lakes connection.

Lindstrom City Council member Roger Lindgren and Chisago City Council member Marie Rivers are visiting Sweden for a special conference. Their trips are supported by HRA/EDAs in both cities and the county chipped in about \$500.

The site for the future bio-business park has been narrowed to a couple possible parcels, the actual location will be announced later. Lindstrom and Chisago City are asking Senator Rick Olseen and Rep. Jeremy Kalin to carry enabling legislation that will allow the two cities to jointly support and split tax revenues from the future project.

There is an international conference in Sweden in September that local officials are making plans to participate in. It annually highlights all the facets of renewable and sustainable energy products and technology. The U.S. version of this symposium was held in southern Minnesota last spring and Lindstrom-Chisago City sent reps and had a booth and made some contacts.

Davis told the audience the chamber is excited to do good things in this region. Swedish-American Chamber members are looking forward to working alongside Minnesota lawmakers like Rep. Jeremy Kalin, who said his task is "removing barriers" and making Minnesota more competitive for this emerging industry.

"We can pass all the (emissions) standards we want," Kalin explained, "but without implementation it doesn't mean a thing."

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