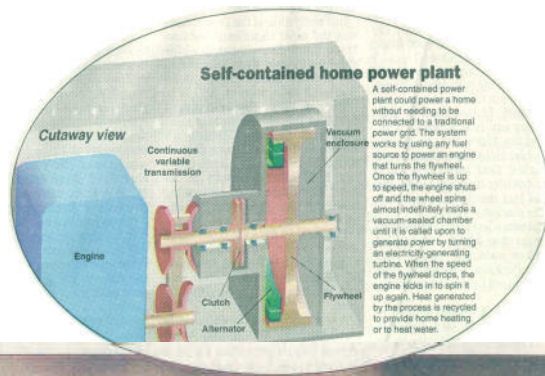


Have idea, will travel



Andre Gennesseaux listens to presentations during the Investing in Innovation forum Tuesday at Western Michigan University's Fetzer Center

A Frenchman looks to make a financial connection in Kalamazoo

BY CHRIS KNAPE
KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

André Gennesseaux just quit his job to change the world.

He might do it in Kalamazoo.

Now all he needs is about \$1 million to get started.

The engineer and inventor traveled from France to Kalamazoo recently to spend two weeks trying to talk people with names like Upjohn and Parfet into providing early funding for a company he calls Energiestro.

The goal is to produce a prototype of his invention — a self-contained power plant that could power a home without needing to be connected to a

traditional power grid — and spawn a new era in how people get electric power.

Developing what he thinks is a world-changing idea is easier than going begging for the money to build it, he conceded. Gennesseaux is an engineer, not a salesman.

"I have learned that with a startup you should be able to convince investors within the time it takes to ride an elevator," he said.

He was permitted a relatively low-profile one-minute introduction at the Southwest Michigan Investing in Innovation Forum on Tuesday. His proposal came too late to make the main list of presenters and there were intellectual property issues that

kept it from making the main list, said Barry Broome, chief executive officer of economic development agency Southwest Michigan First.

"It's a perfect example of a concept being in the right niche, but he doesn't even have a patent for this country" Broome said. "Right now it wouldn't even be in his interest to market this in this country because he doesn't control the intellectual property"

Gennesseaux said he has already secured two key international patents for his invention.

If it works, the miniature flywheel-based power plant he envisions could change the way people get electricity — allowing super-efficient in-home electricity heat and hot

Francois Moyet on left and Andre Gennesseaux on right



water production.

Whether he can raise the money, much less change the world remains to be seen. But, in concept, his device relieves a home's reliance on outside power lines and, theoretically provides enough cheap energy to alleviate power shortages like the rolling blackouts that have been making news in California.

It could also provide power to remote villages without the expense of stringing new power lines or building new power plants.

Better still, the devices are — at least theoretically — more efficient in the way they burn fuel to create heat and electricity promising long-term fuel savings with fewer emissions.

The system works by using any fuel source to power an engine that turns the flywheel. Once the flywheel is up to speed, the engine shuts off and the wheel spins almost indefinitely inside a vacuum-

sealed chamber until it is called upon to generate power by turning a motor.

When the speed of the flywheel drops, the engine kicks in to spin it up again. Heat generated by the process is recycled to provide home heating or to heat water.

Gennesseaux's brother-in-law, local restaurateur Francois Moyet, thinks highly of the idea and wants Gennesseaux to build the company here in Moyet's adopted home town.

Gennesseaux said he envisions building Energiestro from the ground up with support from Kalamazoo area investors. Eventually he wants to either sell the invention to a company like General or Carrier, or build his own plant to make the power systems.

He said he expects early units to sell for around \$10,000, about half what he said GE charges for its fuel cell-based independent power system that uses different and,

Gennesseaux said, less efficient technology.

Similar flywheel-based power systems are used as backup systems at some corporations to prevent any interruption of power supplies. But Gennesseaux said his technology is different because it uses the flywheel system as a primary power source and it creates energy with a standard steel flywheel on regular ball bearings spinning at a far lower rate than other systems.

According to the Energiestro business plan: "There is no technological risk. The innovation lies in the architecture of the system. Nobody has put on the market a generating set with a flywheel energy storage."

So why not do this all in France?

Gennesseaux said it is far more difficult and time consuming to come up with venture capital in his home country and the current shortage of energy on the west coast of the United States should have raised awareness about alternative energy sources in the venture capital community.

"Now it is better in America because you are sensitive to the energy crisis," he said. "I am not saying I am going to give electricity to California next summer. This is a long-term project."

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