

Biogas partner's corporate class graduates from UWO 'Leadership Development' program

by Alex Hummel - Thursday, July 18, 2013

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They dubbed it the “vitocube.”

By day, this rectangular box filled with efficient, solar-heat absorbing granules sits outside and soaks up the sun – no power necessary. At night, the idea is the nomadic peoples of Mongolia – relatively poor people who, while incredibly sustainable, haven't a solution to heat homes – would pull the vitocube into their tents and let the box radiate warmth.

At just less than 50 pounds, it's light enough to be carried by Mongolians on the move. And at an estimated (heavy on the “estimated) \$15 per vitocube, this energy solution could bring Viessmann Group something on the order of \$472 million by 2050. The plan: partner with Habitat for Humanity and other global humanitarian agencies to help get the vitocube into the hands of Mongolian people, thus tapping into a rich consumer market that deserves the comfort of heat billions of other Earthlings enjoy.

... At least, that's how one Viessmann-University of Wisconsin Oshkosh “Leadership Development Program” team saw it. As one student summed it all up, the product “makes the link between Viessmann and local people.”

The vitocube was just one concept born out of the first-ever Leadership Development Program. The program is a spin-off of the successful relationship and partnerships UW Oshkosh and Viessmann have developed dating back to 2008.

In 2011, the two partners – with Viessmann subsidiary BIOFerm Energy Systems of Madison and the UW Oshkosh Foundation – cut the ribbon on the first dry fermentation anaerobic biodigester in the Western hemisphere. The food-and-plant-waste-to-energy plant turns rotting organic material packed into airless storage bunkers south of the Fox River into methane and electricity. It is already capable of generating up to 10 percent of UW Oshkosh's power. They have since helped develop waste-to-energy biodigester plants at regional dairy farms – one, the state's largest at more than 8,000 cows; the other a conventional family farm, with a couple hundred.

This summer, the partnership began planted roots in classrooms and boardrooms on both sides of the Atlantic. After unveiling of the “Viessmann Endowed Chair in Sustainable Technology” at UW Oshkosh in December – the first fully-endowed academic chair at the institution thanks to a tremendous, generous gift from Martin Viessmann and his wife, Annette – program work began to design an academic experience at and send a contingent of UW Oshkosh student interns to Viessmann headquarters in Allendorf, Germany. UW Oshkosh students benefitted from incredibly high-quality, up-close and hands-on internships with the nearly \$3 billion, global efficiency and renewable energy company and its executives.

In the way of exchange, from June to early July, Viessmann sent its first delegation of company managers from operations in Europe to UW Oshkosh. Twenty participants were involved in the Leadership Development Program, hosted by the UW Oshkosh College of Business and facilitated by Professor B.S. Sridhar.

“The value brought to us by this program was much higher than we expected,” said Lukasz Wierzchowski, a Viessmann participant.

Program participants received a certificate of completion for the four-week program on July 11. It was the culmination of intense, business-focused classes in team building, professional development, creative thinking techniques, strategic planning and cultural understanding.

The program also involved visits to, or presentations from, local-, regional- and Wisconsin-based corporations and corporate partners – companies including Mercury Marine, Bemis Co., Curwood Inc., Oshkosh Corporation, Goodwill Industries, Plexus, Inc. and Schreiber Foods.

“I think we can be proud of what we have established thus far,” said Joachim Janssen, Viessmann Group’s chief financial officer and biogas sector leader, stressing that the ultimate goal of the program was to “help enrich our employees and internationalize our way of thinking.”

Students were also able to immerse themselves in American culture. The UW Oshkosh program involved trips to Fox Cities Stadium for baseball, an excursion to Chicago, 4th of July fireworks in Oshkosh and the occasional round of golf.

“I am convinced that the program will be one of many ... UW Oshkosh and Viessmann bring together our goals and vision on both sides of the Atlantic,” Janssen said.

The vitocube presentation, billed as “Heat for Everyone,” was one of five such presentations on July 11 that led up to the program’s miniature commencement. Viessmann participants from diverse sectors within the company teamed up and presented energy solutions built upon the principles of sustainability and efficiency, focused on helping improve life for peoples in the third world and, bottom line, helping Viessmann grow its profits. Presentations also proposed expanding biogas into northern Africa, developing potable water systems in Bangladeshi villages and developing a shared-ownership, portable cooling unit to help Tanzanian farmers get their products to market.

UW Oshkosh Chancellor Richard Wells also applauded the way that the institution’s and Viessmann’s growing relationship has helped bring value to the company while opening gateways to enhance UW Oshkosh students’ international education.

“It’s very important we provide as many opportunities as we can for our students internationally,” Wells said.

Learn more:

- [UWO, partners break ground on biodigester at state's largest dairy farm](#)
- [Viessmann provides landmark gift to endow UW Oshkosh Sustainable Technology program](#)

- [State, UWO, partners rally around small-farm biodigester project \(March 2012\)](#)
- ['Feed the Beast' aims at collecting waste to fuel UWO's biodigester](#)
- [Switch flipped: UWO biodigester producing energy](#)