

Local News

St. George firm touted for role in 'green' future

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ST. GEORGE - John Johnston is an engineer who's seen the light.

Johnston, 44, proudly showed off his new St. George firm to Deputy Premier George Smitherman on Tuesday.

He is counting on the burgeoning light-emitting diode industry to build a brilliant and environmentally sound business. Johnston's new and bright LED lights can create energy savings of up to 80 per cent by replacing the old-style bulbs in street lights and parking lot lights, or mercury vapour lights in gyms and warehouses.

It's a product that Smitherman, who is also the minister of Energy and Infrastructure, found more than intriguing.

"This is very exciting," Smitherman said during a tour of the small plant with Brant MPP Dave Levac. "It's great to see this kind of enthusiasm to bring new technology forward."

Smitherman's visit to ProTerra is part of his promotion of the proposed Green Energy Act, which aims to boost the economy with green jobs while benefiting the environment.

"We want to create a culture of conservation in Ontario," said the minister.

ProTerra could be a poster child for the proposed legislation, which the minister hopes will pass by the summer. It's caught the leading edge of changes in LED lighting that have seen increased wattage that creates enormously bright lights which can replicate daylight.

The company's three main patented products — LED channels that replace fluorescent light bulbs, lights that replace bulbs in parking and street lights, and lights that replace bulbs in bay lights — cost more than their counterparts, but will last longer and save a substantial amount of energy once installed, said Johnston.

"We're working with a company in California that's installed these and they believe that, in three years, they'll be making money on their lighting," Johnston said.

Not only can large industrial, commercial and civic buildings save money on energy, but Johnston said they can realize a tremendous labour savings as well. In some schools, hospitals and companies where fluorescent bulbs have to be replaced frequently, the new LED channels would stay bright for years.

The LED lights have health benefits, especially for those who have problems working under fluorescent lighting.

Plus, he noted, when you replace the fluorescent tube with an LED channel, you also remove the ballast, which is an environmental hazard and generally only lasts about three years.

"We've seen compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) but people jumped too quickly on them. They have mercury in them and are toxic."

LED lighting, on the other hand, has been around since the 1950s but until recently has often been a novelty product.

“LEDs have no hazards and the brightness is finally there. The lights are getting brighter and brighter with less wattage.”

ProTerra’s street lamp replacement — which just replaces the bulb, not the lamp itself — can use a 50 watt LED to provide the same amount of light as an existing 250 watt bulb.

“I feel so enthusiastic when we see an entrepreneur dedicated to such a project,” Smitherman said. “I want to come back here when we see some of the 50,000 jobs we’ve projected are here.”

Started in December, ProTerra has just 11 employees right now but Johnston is confident he’s at the forefront of a huge push. He’s projecting 70 to 80 workers will be on three assembly lines in the plant eventually, plus he expects another 30 to 40 spinoff jobs will be created as all the parts for the LED units are purchased in the area.

For information on the St. George company, go to its website at www.proterraled.com.

<http://www.brantfordexpositor.com>