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Green jobs, clean energy focus of two-day conference

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By Sam Boykin

CHARLOTTE — The N.C. Sustainable Energy Association's annual meeting, planned for Oct. 8 and 9 at the Charlotte Convention Center, is expected to highlight Charlotte's growing role in the state's burgeoning green economy.

The event, "Growing North Carolina's Green Energy Economy: Learning, Connecting & Creating Opportunities Together," will feature leaders from communities across the state and nation for educational sessions, discussions and networking opportunities.

"The Charlotte region has grown tremendously in the last year or two in terms of a green energy economy," said Julie Robinson, the NCSEA's marketing and communications director. "It's the second energy hub of the state as far as green jobs, businesses and community colleges that are training workers in renewable energy and energy efficiency."

The event is expected to draw more than 300 attendees.

The keynote speaker is Amory Lovins, co-founder of the Rocky Mountain Institute, a nonprofit organization that strives to drive the efficient and restorative use of energy resources.

One of the nation's leading voices on renewable energy and energy efficiency, Lovins has been recognized by publications such as Newsweek and Time as one of the world's most influential people.

The luncheon keynote speaker will be John Morrison, assistant secretary of energy at the N.C. Department of Commerce and North Carolina's "energy czar." He coordinates the state's energy efforts and promotes the development of the state's green economy.

Event participants include industry leaders and the nation's top energy and economic experts, including economic and workforce developers, educators, utility and energy regulators, and facility managers and owners.

Discussions also will cover how to receive and maximize federal economic stimulus funds for job creation and ways for government, businesses, educational institutions, non-profits, community organizations and

consumers to work together to grow the state's green economy.

Robinson indicated that one big factor driving the state's renewable energy industry was the passage of the Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency Portfolio Standard (REPS) in 2007, which will require North Carolina's utilities and co-ops to include renewable energy as part of their portfolio by 2021.

Findings from the new Energy & Energy Efficiency Industry Census, which quantify the number of green energy businesses and jobs in North Carolina, also will be discussed.

According to Robinson, an industry census completed by the NCSEA last year found there were approximately 6,400 jobs statewide focused on renewable energy and energy efficiency. Charlotte ranked third, behind Raleigh and Asheville, as having the highest concentration of green jobs.

The new census, Robinson said, "shows a tremendous jump in the Charlotte region, specifically Mecklenburg County."

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