

# Sparking Innovative Energy Solutions in **MICHIGAN**

## Flint & Genesee Chamber Drives Economic Development with New Network

**K**nown for its strength in advanced manufacturing, Flint, Michigan is home to a new network that is driving supply and demand for innovative energy solutions. The E3 Innovation Network, staffed by the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce, brings together a diverse group of interested parties, from fleet-holders with large energy demands to clean-tech innovators. Built on a practical, no-frills model, the network is positively impacting the regional economy and setting an example for chambers nationwide.

With 150 participants to date, the E3 Innovation Network (named for its focus on energy, the environment, and the economy) consists of quarterly meetings and a popular online platform where members can discuss their energy needs and services. The effort, supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and other partners, has resulted in new sales opportunities for Flint businesses and helped to diversify the local economy.

**“Our E3 Innovation Network promotes diversification and the repurposing of our infrastructure and workforce for the clean energy economy. It has contributed to our successful transition and resurgence in manufacturing and other sectors.”**

■ **Janice Karcher, Vice President,** ■  
*Economic Development,  
Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce*

**“Our network helps support the community’s talent and infrastructure, allowing us to develop and produce new technology, including electric vehicle powertrains.”**

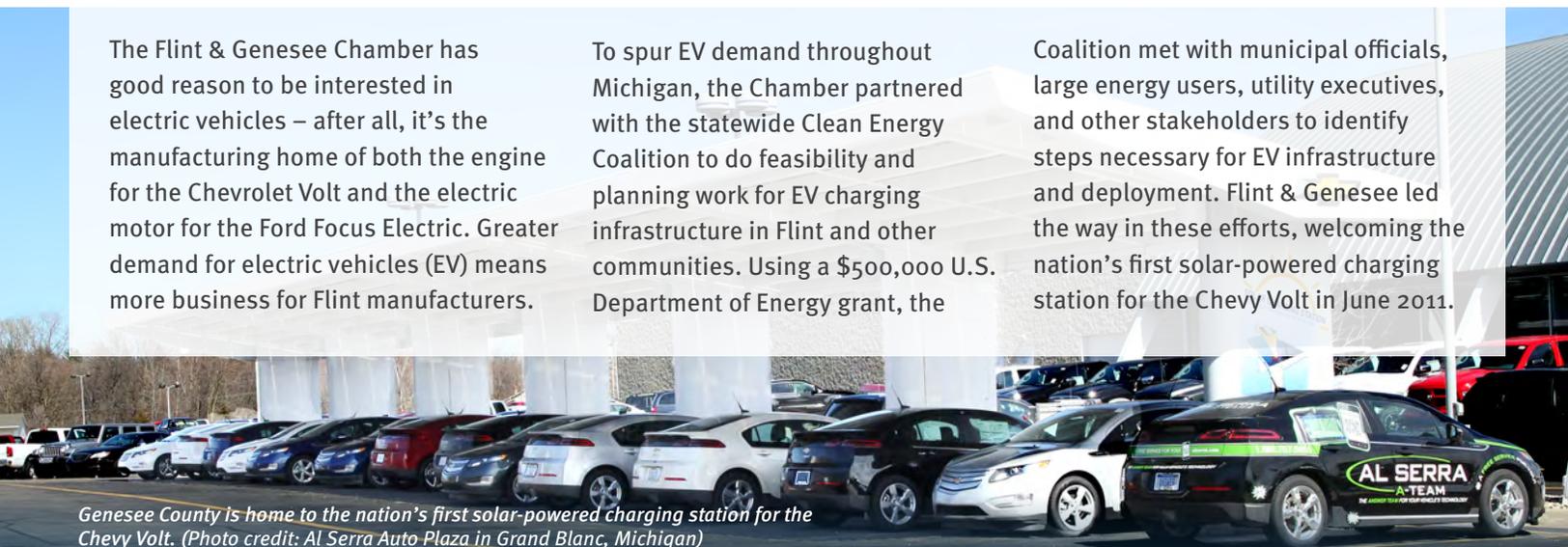
■ **Janice Karcher, Vice President, Economic Development,** ■  
*Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce*

## Recharging Michigan’s **AUTO INDUSTRY**

The Flint & Genesee Chamber has good reason to be interested in electric vehicles – after all, it’s the manufacturing home of both the engine for the Chevrolet Volt and the electric motor for the Ford Focus Electric. Greater demand for electric vehicles (EV) means more business for Flint manufacturers.

To spur EV demand throughout Michigan, the Chamber partnered with the statewide Clean Energy Coalition to do feasibility and planning work for EV charging infrastructure in Flint and other communities. Using a \$500,000 U.S. Department of Energy grant, the

Coalition met with municipal officials, large energy users, utility executives, and other stakeholders to identify steps necessary for EV infrastructure and deployment. Flint & Genesee led the way in these efforts, welcoming the nation’s first solar-powered charging station for the Chevy Volt in June 2011.



# Building a Productive Network: HOW THE CHAMBER DID IT



## 1 UNDERSTOOD THE COMMUNICATION NEEDS & CHALLENGES

In 2009, business and community leaders began discussing clean energy issues, applying for federal and foundation grants, and attending an international summit on the topic. They quickly understood that, regardless of size, mid-Michigan businesses were interested in clean energy, and needed a forum to trade ideas. The Chamber took on the challenge of creating communication channels, which quickly led to business opportunities.

## 2 IDENTIFIED STAKEHOLDERS WHO COULD PARTICIPATE IN AN ENERGY NETWORK

The Chamber began with the simple step of developing a list of stakeholders based on its existing relationships. Chamber staff identified facilities and fleet-holders, who would want to reduce the large amounts of energy they used. They listed entrepreneurs, who were on the ground selling and installing clean energy technologies like solar panels. They identified innovators, who were seeking new market opportunities. Finally, they identified resources like NextEnergy, a Michigan non-profit focused on helping communities increase competitiveness through the commercialization of clean energy.

## 3 MET WITH GROUPS SEPARATELY TO IDENTIFY NEEDS

The Chamber chose to meet with three groups independently (facilities and fleet-holders, entrepreneurs, and clean-tech innovators), knowing their needs would be different. A needs assessment showed that, as a whole, the business community lacked (1) access to clean energy information on products, financing, services, and policy developments; and (2) a platform to connect companies with other clean energy-related groups. The Chamber aimed to meet these needs with its new E3 Innovation Network.

## 4 DESIGNED AN INTERACTIVE ONLINE PORTAL

Knowing that its new E3 Innovation Network needed a digital hub to inform and connect companies, the Chamber designed an interactive web portal that could grow organically. Businesses visit the site to find firms providing clean energy services, learn about clean energy news, and find business opportunities and incentives. Through the website, the Chamber also directs businesses to its LinkedIn page, where businesses network on their own about solutions for energy and environment.

## 5 HELD QUARTERLY NETWORK MEETINGS

To share information and aid in networking, the Chamber began holding quarterly meetings for the E3 Innovation Network. At each meeting, the Chamber brings in experts to inform members about market trends, incentives, and resources. Attendees also have the chance to make shout-outs to announce projects they're working on or services they're looking for. These interactions have created new business opportunities, and made the chamber aware of projects that they can support for economic development.

**Shout-outs by companies at E3's quarterly meetings have been highly successful. A new bio-remediation equipment manufacturer, Sustainable Environmental Technologies, found new contacts at the meetings, leading to new funding, increased sales, facility expansion, and job growth.**



# LESSONS LEARNED

## USE YOUR CHAMBER TO CONVENE AND INSPIRE KEY STAKEHOLDERS

### ✓ Design a network that can grow organically.

Chambers are always short on resources, but can serve their members affordably by creating an information-sharing network that doesn't require constant management. Despite its limited staff and funds, the Flint & Genesee Chamber built such a platform through its web portal and quarterly in-person meetings. By allowing participants to alert others to business opportunities and needs, the Chamber facilitates new partnerships that can continue long after the meeting concludes.

### ✓ Partner with workforce development organizations to ensure your local workers are best prepared for emerging clean-energy fields.

The Flint & Genesee Chamber took a leading role in coordinating with other organizations to prepare the local workforce for clean energy opportunities. By engaging members in manufacturing and other sectors, it helped identify employers' needs within emerging energy markets, and informed workforce-development partners so that they could plan training programs accordingly.



## LEARN MORE

Visit the E3 Innovation Network's website at:  
[e3innovationnetwork.com](http://e3innovationnetwork.com)

Find clean energy incentives in Michigan and other states that you can share with your members:

[dsireusa.org](http://dsireusa.org) and [nextenergy.org](http://nextenergy.org)

Learn more about Michigan's Clean Energy Coalition and its work on electric vehicles:

[cec-mi.org](http://cec-mi.org)

For assistance in creating your own clean energy network, contact Chambers for Innovation and Clean Energy:

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