

Specialist High Skills Major Energy Conference

On November 24, I attended the two-day SHSM Energy Conference in Niagara Falls. I had no idea what to expect when I embarked on this trip. I was hoping it would be a fairly informative series of lectures; however, all my expectations were exceeded by far. The first speaker was a magician entertainer named Scott Hammell. He performed some utterly fascinating stunts for the crowd but also had a compelling message about overcoming obstacles and persevering even when “life gives you lemons”. The next presentation was a Q and A panel of Energy engineers, skilled workers, and graduates of energy programs. They discussed some interesting topics about the future of the energy sector and the rich employment opportunities for energy students. Their message was very relevant to all the students in the conference and the presentation wrapped up the evening.

The next morning there was a keynote address by David Arkell, president and CEO of 360 Energy Incorporated. His presentation introduced students to the energy industry as it is today. He provided students with essential background information about the energy industry. He talked about how oil is the gold standard for energy prices and gave a breakdown of our energy sources. He advocated more energy conservation and pointed out that it is cheaper to conserve energy than to generate more. One of his messages was that students like us will bring innovation to the energy industry and that without new ideas a green energy industry is not possible.

The tour of CRS electronics I attended was very fascinating and took up the entire morning. The facility at CRS was unassuming on the outside but state of the art on the inside. CRS had a large R&D department where they tested weather proofing, light dispersion, and heat emissions. Some of the fascinating development tools CRS had were a thermal imaging camera, 3D model printer, and a room sized sphere to measure light emissions from their newly developed LED lights. The tour was an exciting look at the future of LED technology.

After the lunch break, the next round of offsite tours and info sessions began. I attended the “solar 101 to solar 501” session and the solar car racing session. The solar session was hosted by an energy advocate who had done extensive work in communities starting and fundraising for solar panel projects. He had some interesting points about how solar panels provide a great deal of energy to individual structures, reducing load on the grid, and how the savings on energy cost can eventually overcome the capital cost and the panels can become profitable. The most important message he had was that small scale solar projects are both viable and an important part of our energy future. The second session I attended that afternoon was on solar car racing. The session was very informative, talking about solar car technology, design, and the amazing feats of some solar vehicles. Solar car racing has an important future because it is a testing ground for both solar and electric car technology.

The SHSM Energy Conference was a rare opportunity and a great event to attend. Despite being the first year, it was pulled off seamlessly and had great information. I believe every student in attendance went home with valuable insight and ideas for the future. Many thanks to the school board and to the Ministry of Education for hosting such a great event.

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