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Clean Earth Action

Use of alternative fuels at forefront of Igleheart's environmental efforts

In the early 1990s, campaign consultant Kent Igleheart decided he'd had enough of managing others' political campaigns and in a move of "pure dumb luck" took a job organizing a conference in Atlanta, Ga., on alternative fuels.

Igleheart, who graduated from Furman in 1985 with a bachelor's degree in economics and business administration, has been in the environmental trenches ever since. "It turned out that Atlanta was one of the first cities doing major work with alternative fuels, so it was pretty exciting to do something that was different and that was about to take off," he says.

Eventually, Igleheart started Clean



Kent Igleheart

Earth Action, a company that creates and manages projects that involve alternative fuel vehicles, such as cars powered by electricity or by natural gas. The company's work also

extends to such issues as air and water quality. (Visit the Web site at www.cleanearthaction.com.)

With his staff of five, Igleheart puts together project teams to help corporate executives understand what alternative fuels are, how companies might benefit from them, and what the financial aspects include. "They look to us because we're removed. We're not Georgia Power. We're not Atlanta Gas Light," he explains. "We're the unbiased, central group."

In addition to project management, Clean Earth Action runs the Clean Cities programs in Atlanta and in Birmingham, Ala. Clean Cities, a non-profit organization sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy, supports public and private partnerships that deploy alternative fuel vehicles and build supporting infrastructure. In 2001, Igleheart — cited by Clean Cities as "a shining example of how to incorporate alternative fuels and vehicles into local markets" — was named the group's coordinator of the year.



JULIE BUNNER

One project Igleheart is currently working on in Atlanta is the "station car" concept. The program features a fleet of shared electric vehicles available for commuters to take to work from the city's MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) stops, or to use for running errands during the day.

"For example," says Igleheart, "BellSouth is going to have a new building at the Lindbergh MARTA station located at Piedmont Road, and they're going to put in 20 or so chargers for electric vehicles. They'll have small electric cars that their employees can use if they take MARTA or carpool in to work.

"One reason people don't use mass transit, like MARTA, is because a lot of times MARTA may not go where they need to go. They need to go to a doctor's appointment or a meeting out somewhere, so they'll just drive their own car. The station car concept will actually let them take MARTA in to work, then use the electric cars for the errands."

Igleheart, who says he "burned out" as a campaign consultant after managing numerous campaigns, returned to politics in 2001 when he ran for the Roswell City Council — and was elected to a four-year term.

As the former Furman student body president explains his decision, "Once you get politics in your blood, formaldehyde is the only thing that takes it out."

On the council, Igleheart heads the transportation department and deals with everything from alternative fuel issues to

watershed concerns and nitty-gritty issues like traffic signals and road paving. "It's been quite an education," he says.

Although Igleheart has been disheartened by a lack of federal support for alternative fuels, he does see progress in the Atlanta area, particularly among corporations and governmental agencies. MARTA currently has 342 natural gas buses and, he says, is working to move its entire fleet to natural gas. In addition, Atlanta has more than 200 charging stations for electric vehicles and 50 natural gas stations.

Igleheart realizes that pro-active changes will take time. "When the first cars came to Atlanta in 1902, we didn't have a gas station on every corner. It took quite a while for that to happen," he notes. "That's why we're focusing on governments and businesses that have fleets of vehicles. Eventually we'll see more and more fueling stations."

Clean Earth Action also frequently takes its message into the schools in the belief that educating children is the key to increasing the use of alternative fuel vehicles. "I've always said that alternative fuels are a lot like recycling was in the '70s," Igleheart says. "If we focus on the kids, by the time they're ready to buy a car they'll be asking their parents for a hybrid or all-natural gas vehicle."

— Nancy R. Fullbright

The author, a 1995 Furman graduate, is a communications specialist with the Georgia Institute of Technology Economic Development Institute in Gainesville.