



THOUGHT LEADERS

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Panel says next decade will see advances in new energy technologies



ALL PHOTOS: JOED VIERA

Above: "If we fix this economically, if we come up with a better and more cost-effective solution, the fossil-fuel industry goes away," says Jon Williams, CEO of Viridi Parente. Below: Robert Anstey, CEO of Graphenix Development, says it's essential to channel funding toward renewable energy.

BY DAN MINER
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Things are quickly changing at the vast intersection of climate science, energy technology and government laws and policies.

A recent roundtable discussion in Buffalo highlighted that evolution. The question is whether they're changing fast enough.

"Whether it's permafrost in the Arctic or ocean acidification, the prioritization of making these technologies work and scale over the next decade is one of the most important things we can do," said Ryan McPherson,

the University at Buffalo's chief sustainability officer.

McPherson's job highlights that change. He is spearheading UB's efforts to be climate neutral by 2030. By the end of this year, UB will have increased the amount of solar electricity generated on campus by 15 times its current levels, part of a bigger project with SUNY Buffalo State, SUNY Erie, the City of Buffalo and Erie County.

The panel was part of Business First's Thought Leaders Discussion Series, hosted by Hodgson Russ LLP at its downtown headquarters. Other participants included Robert Anstey, CEO of Buffalo-based ultracapac-



with ROBERT ANSTEY, RYAN MCPHERSON, and JON WILLIAMS



“Billions of (government) dollars are funneling into fossil fuel that we could point toward renewables. We could retrain the domestic supply chain and we don’t need to increase taxes.”

ROBERT ANSTEY, CEO, Graphenix Development



“We have stuff baked into the climate change equation no matter what we do. The question is, can we keep the really bad stuff from happening by what we do in the next 10 years?”

RYAN MCPHERSON, chief sustainability officer, University at Buffalo.



“No matter what we do as a race, things are going to change. Sometimes we can control those changes. But if you innovate, and if you look for a more efficient design and design to efficiency, we will solve those challenges.”

JON WILLIAMS, CEO, Viridi Parente

► HODGSON'S TAKE



“It takes a long time to get from zero percent to 5 percent adoption (of new technological paradigms). But once you get past a certain tipping point, it’s a rapid adoption of a new technology in ways that are hard to predict as people are experiencing it in real time.”

PETER ROSS, senior associate

► CLOSER LOOK AT THOUGHT LEADERS

Thought Leaders is an ongoing series of discussions with Western New York business leaders and attorneys at Hodgson Russ LLP.

Throughout the year, leaders in diverse industries meet for a roundtable discussion moderated by Business First journalists. Excerpts from the conversation are published after the roundtable.

Discussions are held in the law firm’s Pearl Street offices in Buffalo.

itor startup Graphenix Development; Jon Williams, CEO of lithium-ion battery startup Viridi Parente; and Hodgson Russ attorneys Mila Buckner and Peter Ross.

Anstey said his ultracapacitor technology – which is manufactured at the Eastman Business Park in Rochester – proposes a high-efficiency energy source that could power entire fleets of municipal buses. But he said the complicated sales cycle and vast competition from heavily subsidized research in China makes his mission a heavily competitive one.

“I’m optimistic, but it’s going to be a lot of hard work and a lot of perseverance to get through there,” Anstey said.

Williams, whose company has developed battery-storage technology for different uses, said Viridi Parente was started because of demand by end-users of



Mila Buckner, left, an associate at Hodgson Russ LLP, says that younger people have been raised with a belief in the necessity of sustainable energy.

his other company, OSC Manufacturing and Equipment Services.

Contractors who have long worked with diesel equipment wanted everything from vehicles to industrial lighting powered by lithium-ion batteries. The solution – heavily-protected battery packs – can be used to replace everything from equipment drive trains to electricity storage at commercial buildings.

Williams said his core thesis about

renewable technology is that it must be more financially competitive than fossil-fuel alternatives. That, he said, is what will drive widespread adoption throughout the world.

“If we fix this economically, if we come up with a better and more cost-effective solution, the fossil-fuel industry goes away,” Williams said. “We can bring about those changes through market solutions.”



“It’s taken a couple of generations of impressing upon people that we really need to do this. Now the younger generations are growing up with, ‘OK, sustainability is really important.’”

MILA BUCKNER, associate