

By Michael Bielecki - May. 27, 2010, 12:04am

VERO BEACH — Two companies working together in hopes of producing biofuel out of refuse from the Indian River County landfill spent two hours Wednesday evening answering questions and explaining their concept to a crowd of about 80 at the Vero Beach Heritage Center.

INEOS Bio and New Planet Energy Florida hosted the open house to explain what they are planning for the former Ocean Spray plant. Those plans include retrofitting and rebuilding the factory to create a \$100 million cutting-edge bio-energy facility, company officials said.

The vibe at the open house was both curious and positive, as several INEOS staff spent most of the two hours explaining all aspects of the soon-to-be Indian River BioEnergy Center to the public.

Jan Goodman, production manager for Genuine Bio-Fuel Incorporated in Indiantown, was one of the interested Vero Beach residents on hand.

“If we can turn waste anything into fuel and jobs for this community, I’m all for it,” said Goodman. “What happens a lot with these projects – even though the project may be viable - is they build the place, but they don’t get it running. Let’s hope that doesn’t happen with this project.”

A handful of the Workforce Solutions staff, a private, non-profit company that helps employers with staffing needs, came to the event to gather information and show their support.

Janice Meehan, a business services consultant for the company, was excited at the possibility of her company helping INEOS by holding a job fair or with the training of personnel.

“We are excited that Vero Beach has bio-energy coming to town – it’s huge,” said Meehan. “Indian River County is a little behind St. Lucie County and Martin County as far as projects of this kind, and it is great for everyone here that this is happening.

According to Dan Cummings, INEOS Business Manager, Americas Division, they will break ground on the plant this fall. While they don’t have all of their permitting and licensing approved as of yet, he said all facets of the project are on schedule.

“We’re set to close on the property next month,” said Cummings, of the former Ocean Spray property adjacent to the Indian River County Landfill off Oslo Road.

Of the 200 jobs INEOS expects to bring to the county, 150 of them would be construction jobs. Fifty full-time jobs would be available at the site once the plant becomes operational in two years.

The plant is expected to produce 8 million gallons of bio-fuel per year. INEOS is the largest licensor of chemical technology in the world, and has 64 manufacturing facilities in 14 countries.