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OriginOil takes another step up technology ladder

BY SCOTT TITTRINGTON

The quest to transform algae into the biofuel of the future is now one step closer to reality for a Culver City neighbor.

OriginOil, housed in a small industrial warehouse on West Adams Boulevard just a few blocks east of the city limits, announced Jan. 28 it is taking its technology for turning algae into petroleum from the "bench" stage to the "pilot" stage, a major development for a small company that opened for business less than three years ago.

"It is really exciting to be at this stage. Our development has been very rapid," said Dr. Vikram M. Patterkine, OriginOil's chief scientist, during the Jan. 28 media event. "We have a technology development roadmap that we follow. This is a milestone on the technology development roadmap."

OriginOil is the brainchild of President and CEO Riggs Eckelberry, an entrepreneur with a "high tech" background who teamed with his brother, Nicholas Eckelberry, to launch the company in 2007. From those initial patent filings, the company has now de-

veloped its technology that allows for the closed system transformation of algae into oil, utilizing a combination of water, sunlight, nutrients and carbon dioxide and its highly sophisticated cultivation system to make large-scale production of commercial algae feasible.

"We've done so much to take the company from garage phase, to the do-it-for-real, we-are-a-true company," Eckelberry said.

"There's a big race on to make algae really work as a substitute for petroleum. We're all going at full tilt to make that technology happen, and get them to market so that we can make a difference."

Spearheading that full-tilt approach has been Patterkine, who came aboard 18 months ago and holds a Ph.D. in environmental engineering with a focus on biological process engineering.

For much of his professional career, Patterkine has been devoted to stopping algae growth in the wild, labeling it "a nuisance if you don't control it." However, joining the OriginOil development team allowed him to reverse course and look for ways to encourage

algae growth for a positive purpose.

Because the company's technology allows for that growth to take place in a closed system, OriginOil believes it holds two distinct advantages over other biofuel sources. First, it does not require the use and possible destruction of farmland. Second, as already mentioned, the cultivation process requires vast amounts of carbon dioxide, and therefore takes that enemy of the environment and uses it in a productive manner.

"It (algae) is not competing with anything, and plus, it is taking up Co2, which everybody wants to get rid of," Patterkine said. "For every ton of biomass, you get rid of two tons of carbon dioxide."

Now that OriginOil has entered the pilot stage, the idea is to put the technology into the hands of the major energy producers, prove that it can work on a global scale and earn its slice of the multi-billion dollar biofuel pie.

"It means I don't have to raise billions. They do," said Eckelberry, pointing to the likes of Exxon Mobil and other energy

heavyweights.

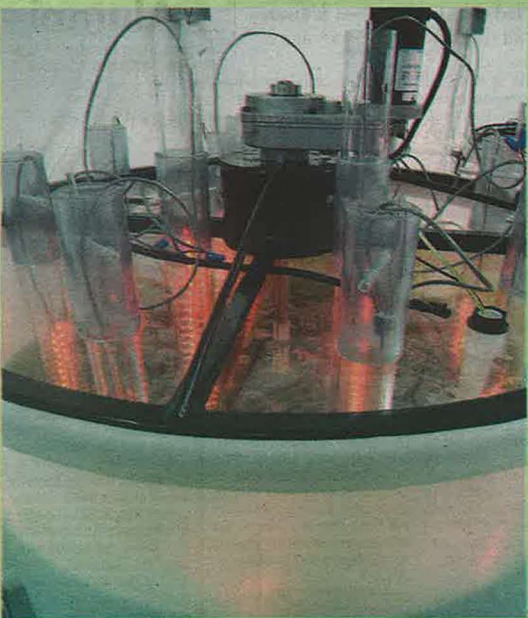
"The light at the end of the tunnel, it's actually an onrushing train. We're actually looking at the possibility of revenue. It's out

there, so it's very exciting."

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An employee at OriginOil in Los Angeles looks inside one of the 20-gallon tanks used in the production of algae that can be turned into oil. Below left is another view of one of the tanks. Contributed Photo



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