



## Nature, nurture



Above, Kevin Chang, president of Four Seasons Orchids, tends to his flowers, below, in a greenhouse at the Rutgers EcoComplex in Bordentown. The complex is the state's largest incubator for environmentally friendly businesses.

PHOTOS BY NOAH ADDIS/STAR-LEDGER

### Rutgers EcoComplex helps small firms become green giants

BY BETH FITZGERALD  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Like most companies, Acron started with a bright idea: Turn the methane gas wafting from decomposing trash at the local dump into fuel for trucks.

Now, owner Bill Brown's company is gearing up to produce commercial quantities of compressed liquid methane as an alternative to diesel fuel — part of the craze for any and all things green.

Similar businesses are sprouting up every day. A few will become the Microsoft or Intel of the 21st century. Most will live short lives, with their owners learning just how difficult it is to go from an idea to a company that can generate the kind of green that falls to the bottom line.

In the center of it all in New Jersey may be the Rutgers EcoComplex. Already, the so-called green business incubator is doing what incubators have long done, giving entrepreneurs the basics: a place to set up shop and turn an idea into a reality, all without breaking the bank.

"The EcoComplex was a fantastic resource for us," said Brown, who graduated from the facility's temporary, low-cost quarters before moving his company back to Ohio. "There's not another facility like it. Nobody has accomplished what New Jersey has done."

New Jersey is a hotbed for renewable-energy ventures, experts said, but the missing link is central coordination between government, academia, business and nonprofits.

"We could do more than any other state," said Jeff Tittel, head of the state's Sierra Club chapter. "There are lots of individual efforts here and there, but not [See **ECOCOMPLEX**, Page 33]



### ECOCOMPLEX

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enough leadership from government. We have the best global-warming scientists in the nation, between Princeton and Rutgers; we have everything we need to be a national or international leader."

#### GREENHOUSES

The Rutgers EcoComplex, part of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, is the granddaddy of New Jersey's green incubators. It began in 1995 as a 45,000-square-foot greenhouse in Florence that is heated and lighted by methane from the nearby Burlington County landfill; its 30,000-square-foot lab, office and conference building opened in 2001.

Other environmental-business incubators are emerging, as well. One is part of Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison. The other will be launched this fall by the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission in Lyndhurst.

FDU's incubator is "virtual." Instead of moving into the same building, entrepreneurs get advice via phone or e-mail from the project's director, Jonathan Cloud.

These days, for example, he's advising an FDU engineering student and a professor who will begin converting gasoline vehicles to hybrids or pure electric cars this summer, and is working with tap water and hydropower ventures.

Michel Bitritto manages the New Jersey Meadowlands Business Accelerator, and she's talking to a dozen companies about moving this fall into a 12,700-square-foot building in Lyndhurst. The focus will be on alternative and renewable energy, and green technology.

"This grows out of Gov. Corzine's energy master plan — we will help to implement and nurture those technologies that make us more sustainable," Bitritto said. "With energy prices hitting everyone in the pocketbook, the time is right to do this."

The EcoComplex's tenants include orchid grower Kevin Chang, who is leasing greenhouse space at discounted prices while he gets his commercial nursery off the ground. Other tenants are working with alternative fuels, including ethanol, biodiesel and methane, as well as drinking water purification and carbon dioxide reduction.

The EcoComplex, meanwhile, is

a joint venture with Burlington County, whose landfill supplies the methane, carbon dioxide, waste wood, crushed glass and waste water EcoComplex ventures tap for their research.

#### ROOM TO GROW

EcoComplex acting director David Specca still has some vacant lab space and is looking for at least three more tenants. There's also some room in the greenhouse.

"We can offer a lot to companies working on bioenergy, because of the solid waste, water quality and engineering expertise we have at Rutgers and at this facility," said Specca, whose family also operates a vegetable farm in Burlington County.

He sees potential for alternative energy technology from "biomass" — the organic refuse produced by New Jersey's 8 million-plus, densely packed population. "There's a lot of energy available in trash if you have the right technology, and as the price of energy rises, technologies that are sitting on the shelf now are going to be developed."

Ventures generally get a five-year start in the incubator, where they get to lease lab and office

space at below-market prices, as well as technical help and guidance — then they move on, to make way for other startups.

EcoComplex graduate TerraCycle, the Trenton company that makes organic plant food from worm excrement, expects to hit \$8 million in revenue this year.

"We would not exist today without the EcoComplex," said chief executive Tom Szaky, who founded TerraCycle in his Princeton University dorm room in 2001. "They gave us space when we couldn't afford it. They gave us terms we could live with."

The Burlington County landfill adjacent to the EcoComplex uses landfill methane to run a 7.5 megawatt electricity generator.

Robert Simkins, Burlington County's district solid-waste coordinator, envisions the EcoComplex as a clearinghouse for trash-to-energy projects around the state.

"It's just a matter of time and it's word of mouth. We don't have a big staff that can go out and market this," he said.

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## U.S. probes activities of Katz as union chief

### Corzine's ex-girlfriend loses bid to regain post

BY JOSH MARGOLIN  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Federal authorities have opened an investigation into the union activities of Carla Katz, the ousted leader of New Jersey's largest state-worker union and former girlfriend of Gov. Jon Corzine.

Investigators are seeking union records connected with Katz's management of Communications Workers of America Local 1034, according to three people familiar with a subpoena issued Tuesday. The authorities are focusing on an internal CWA probe that recently accused Katz of misappropriating union money, said the sources, who declined to be identified because they were not authorized to discuss the probe.

Separately, a federal judge in Trenton yesterday denied Katz's petition to be reinstated as union head, pending a formal hearing on the charges against her.

U.S. District Judge Freda L. Wolfson said the national union appeared to be acting within its rights when it locked Katz and her fellow Local 1034 officers out of their headquarters and installed a temporary administrator to manage the local's affairs July 7.

The judge did grant Katz's request to postpone a July 22 union hearing on the ouster, but left it to attorneys to determine when that hearing should be rescheduled, adding they should select a date "that is soon."

The criminal inquiry came into public view Tuesday afternoon when federal agents served a subpoena on CWA national headquarters in Washington. [See **KATZ**, Page 5]

## Pentagon looking to boost its forces in Afghanistan

BY LOLITA C. BALDOR  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Pentagon leaders yesterday signaled a surge in U.S. forces in Afghanistan "sooner rather than later" — a shift that could come later this year as they prepare to cut troop levels in Iraq.

Faced with an increasingly sophisticated insurgency, particularly along Afghanistan's border with Pakistan, defense officials said that sending more troops would have a significant impact on the violence.

"I think that we are clearly working very hard to see if there are opportunities to send additional forces sooner rather than later," Defense Secretary Robert Gates told Pentagon reporters. But he added that no final decisions or recommendations have been made.

His comments suggested an acceleration in what had been plans to shift forces there early next year. And they came as the political discourse on Afghanistan as a key military priority escalated on both Capitol Hill and the presidential campaign trail.

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who recently returned from meetings with commanders in Afghanistan, said they clearly want more [See **TROOPS**, Page 6]

#### LOCAL NEWS

### Judge will get his day in court

A Superior Court judge will decide on the fate of a civil suit against state Supreme Court Justice Roberto Rivera-Soto stemming from his intervention in a feud involving his son. Page 13



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