

**GREEN BUSINESS CHAMPION**

# California Clean Tech Open rewards creativity

Champions receive money, mentors and office space

BY ELIZABETH BROWNE  
San Francisco Business Times Contributor

**T**he California Clean Tech Open is working to turn bright ideas into businesses that can help the environment.

The annual competition began as “a vehicle to accelerate and create cleantech companies in California,” said Michael Santullo, a Silicon Valley serial entrepreneur and co-founder of the competition.

And it’s worked. Since the first competition in 2006, the California Clean Tech Open has mentored more than 95 entrepreneurs and awarded more than \$1.2 million in cash and services. In aggregate, alumni from the competition have gone on to raise more than \$50 million in venture capital funding to help bring their companies to the next stage.

**WINNER**  
**CALIFORNIA**  
**CLEAN TECH OPEN**

There are other cleantech competitions out there, and CCTO wasn’t the first, but “we have far outstripped what anyone else is doing in the country or world,” said Marc Gottschalk, a co-founder and attorney at law firm Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati.

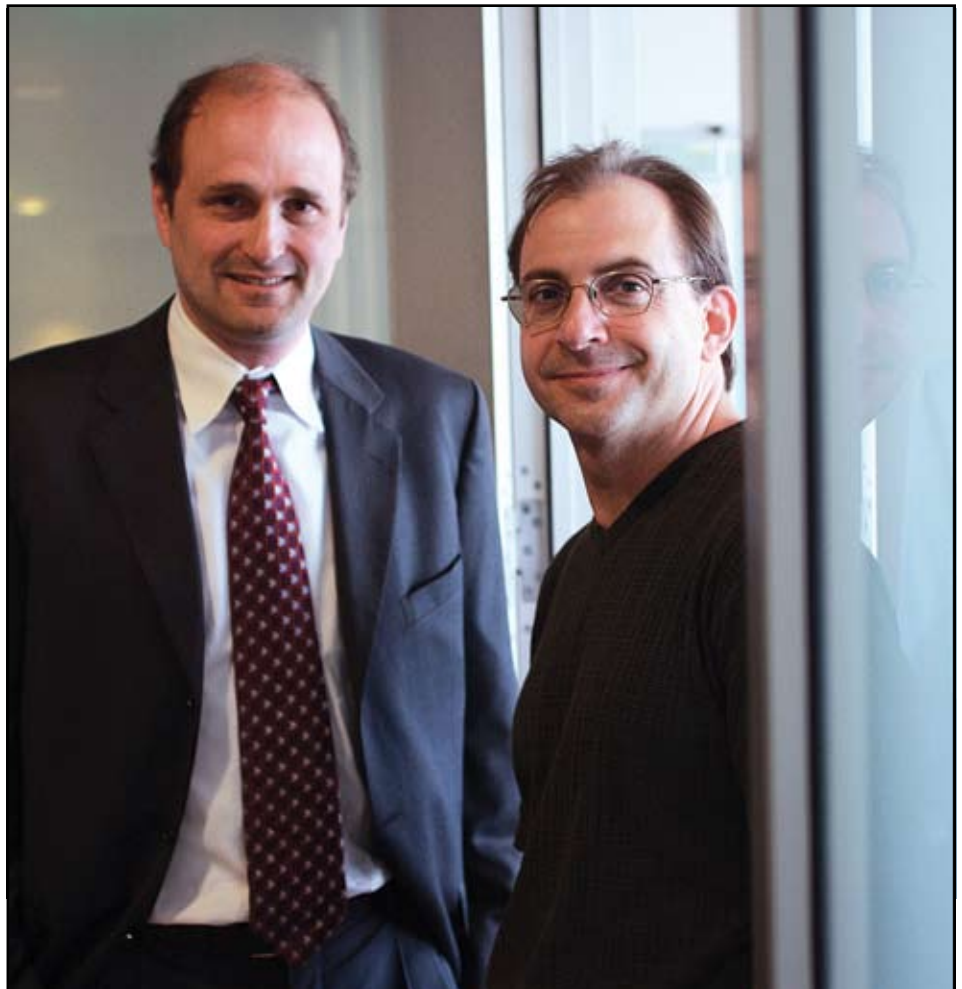
The difference is access. The California Clean Tech Open has drummed up support from a long list: companies like PG&E, Google, Lexus, and Siemens; venture capital firms like Draper Fisher Jurvetson; and research institutions including Stanford; University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Davis; and the public-private labs in the area, such as Lawrence Livermore and SRI. The support comes in the form of sponsorships and partnerships, and these groups supply judges for the competition and networking sources for competition entrants.

In that way, CCTO is more than just a competition. Gottschalk and Santullo like to think of it as a “virtual incubator” for startup cleantech companies.

Fifty finalists selected from the initial entries in six categories — air, water and waste; energy efficiency; green building; renewables; smart power; and transportation — are paired with mentors and get assistance developing a more detailed business plan. Even if those finalists don’t “win” the competition, through the competition’s workshops and mentoring services, they can get a leg up on turning their green ideas to thriving businesses. Because the contest is geared toward those with less experience turning an idea into a business, that can be a big benefit.

Winners of the competition receive \$50,000 in cash and \$50,000 in services — what Santullo and Gottschalk call a “startup in a box” that includes office space for one year, and legal, recruiting, accounting, public relations, insurance and marketing services.

This year’s awards will be handed out Oct. 29. Already, winners and finalists from 2006 and 2007



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**Marc Gottschalk of Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati and serial entrepreneur Michael Santullo have created a cleantech incubator.**

**CALIFORNIA CLEAN TECH OPEN**

**Co-founders:** Michael Santullo and Marc Gottschalk.

**Year founded:** First competition in 2006.

**What it does:** Its business plan competitions have mentored more than 95 entrepreneurs and awarded more than \$1.2 million in cash and services.

have been hitting milestones. Among them:

■ Livermore-based Cool Earth Solar, a runner-up in 2006’s competition, recently closed a \$22 million Series A financing round for its solar balloon concept.

■ A 2007 winner, Southern California-based NiLA, which manufactures LED movie lights that save 65 percent to 85 percent of the energy of traditional movie lighting, recently signed a distribution deal with the largest lighting distributor in the world. Its lights were used in the filming of upcoming James Bond film “Quantum of Solace.”

“We have created a tremendous platform for people who have great ideas and don’t know how to bring them to fruition,” Gottschalk said. “... And also to help us move forward to a more sustainable future.”

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