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FEATURED

## Symposium on energy and climate change Saturday

Local nonprofit Open Minds tackling big-picture issues

By Amy M. Peters, Planet Contributor

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Emily Reichert, CEO of Greentown Labs, the largest clean technology startup incubator in the U.S., is one of three panelists during Saturday's "Tackling the Climate + Energy Challenge Now: Hear from the Experts" symposium. (Courtesy photo)

Four years ago, Telluride resident Jeff Katz had an idea to invite interesting, smart people to the beautiful San Juan Mountains to explore critical topics. Partnering with part-time local David Baldwin, Katz created and funded Open Minds, a local nonprofit symposium that will

host a public discussion Saturday evening called “Tackling the Climate + Energy Challenge Now: Hear from the Experts.”

“This year’s big topic is this vexing combination of energy and climate change,” explained Katz. “Most of the world needs more energy and all of the world needs a solution to carbon output impacting the planet.”

Katz — an engineer who is the former CEO of SwissAir and founding chairman and CEO of Orbitz, and launched Journera, a software infrastructure product in 2016 — has a 40-year background in the travel and tech industries. As co-president of SCF Partners, a Houston-based private equity company, Baldwin, who is also an engineer, is involved with developing energy tools, businesses and systems. Their business backgrounds have enabled each to meet interesting innovators who are willing to lend expertise to local Open Minds symposiums.



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Katz explains that the focus of this symposium is, “Now what?”

“With that in mind, we have extremes on our panel, from the engineering practical to research and development. We will be here to eat, drink, be merry and problem-solve,” Katz said.

From 5-5:30 p.m., Dr. Scott Tinker, founder of The Switch Energy Alliance and creator of The Switch Series of documentaries, will present ideas around “Understanding the Global Energy and Climate Challenges.” Tinker — who is also the director of the Bureau of Economic Geology, the state geologist of Texas and a professor of geosciences at the University of

Texas — motivates audiences, which are often younger, via understandable presentations around climate and energy challenges.

“This is a problem that is several decades long, maybe several generations-long, in its fixing,” Katz said. “Dr. Tinker is out there trying to inform, inspire and motivate the coming generation.”

The main symposium, which runs from 5:30-6:15 p.m. and is titled “Using Science and Innovation to Address the Dual Challenges,” will be moderated by Jeff Jordan. Jordan is the former CEO of Open Table and PayPal, former president of eBay, and current managing partner at Andreessen Horowitz, which is one of the top venture capital firms in the world.



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“Venture capital firms put money at risk on really good people and really big ideas, knowing that they may not work,” Katz explained. “Andreessen Horowitz is a company that looks for ideas and people that will shatter the way we think about things. Jeff is really experienced at seeing smart people and wonderful ideas and then trying to calculate what’s a loser and what could work, and if an idea does work, it could change the world.”

The symposium’s three panelists are Emily Reichert, CEO of Greentown Labs, the largest clean technology startup incubator in the U.S.; John Berger, CEO of Sunnova, the world’s leading residential solar power developer; and MIT Aeronautics and Astronautics Professor Dr. Steven Barrett, whose goal is a carbon-neutral aviation industry.

“He’s built a flying, scale model, hydrogen-powered airplane,” Katz said. “His vision is to make them all emit zero carbon.”

The symposium, which is co-hosted by the Telluride Foundation, has attracted luminaries from the science, industry and finance fields, which along with governments, are fundamental to addressing climate change over the long haul, Katz said. He added that head of MIT's Media Lab Dr. Dava Newman, who focuses on collecting data from instruments in space to visualize what's happening to the planet; and Barbara Burger, Chevron Technology Ventures president, who utilizes research and development for more energy-friendly creation of fuels, while dealing with their after effects, are two professionals interested in Open Minds.

When asked whether it's possible to solve the dual energy and climate challenge, Katz chuckled.



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"That's the puzzle. Let's be positive and say yes. The real answer is we have to," he said. "Everyone wants a long-lived, healthy planet. Some markets are further ahead than others. China, for example, is a big producer of carbon output and they're still coal-burners. The U.S. is less so but it's one planet. If there's a lot of innovation and an extraordinary amount of collaboration, it can happen. After all, some things haven't even been invented yet."

Katz added that for anybody who cares about Telluride and its beauty and the health of the planet, this will be an interesting forum, especially for kids.

"They're going to solve harder problems than we are because they have more time," he said. "So if we can motivate them and they get to see and meet world-famous, super-interesting people, what a treat."

The Open Minds symposium, open to the public and free of charge, takes place Saturday at 5 p.m. at the Nugget Theater. Masks and proof of a COVID-19 vaccination are required.