GRID Alternatives’ Erica Mackie Honored for Energy Leadership

Mackie, co-founder of the nation’s largest nonprofit solar installer, was one of six mid-career women who received a Clean Energy and Empowerment award from DOE-MIT partnership.

As part of the U.S. Clean Energy Education and Empowerment (C3E) program, run by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the MIT Energy Initiative (MITEI), GRID Alternative’s Erica Mackie was recognized for her leadership and accomplishments in the area of entrepreneurship and innovative business models at the annual C3E Women in Clean Energy Symposium on Friday, September 20th.

“I am convinced the only solution we can find to climate change is one that must include women and must include all of our communities, because otherwise it will not be successful,” Mackie said at the awards presentation.

Mackie is the CEO and co-founder of GRID Alternatives, a Bay Area-based non-profit that brings the benefits of solar to low-income communities. She founded the organization in 2001, while working as a professional engineer implementing large-scale renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for the private sector. Her vision was to make these technologies available to communities that need the savings the most, but have the least access.

“At GRID Alternatives our vision is that our power can be produced cleanly, but the only way to get there is by inclusive and equitable solutions,” Mackie said. “Equitable solutions not only because they will be the key to market transformation, but because they are the only way towards a just solution. In the U.S. low-income communities are disproportionately paying the price for power generation and disproportionately paying the price for climate change. GRID Alternatives is putting clean power, one system at a time, in neighborhoods that typically have no access. These tangible projects allow everyone, regardless of economic status, regardless of gender, regardless of race, to participate in the solution, and I am convinced that’s the only way we will have a solution.”

Before becoming an engineer, Mackie worked with at-risk youth from the Chicago-area juvenile justice system, leading groups of teenagers from the South Side of Chicago on therapeutic wilderness trips in Northern Ontario. Her career and success demonstrate the
power of bringing together the rigorous technical approach of an engineer with the focus of a social worker to serve individuals and communities in need.

One of six mid-career women recognized by the C3E program, Mackie was selected from a nationwide pool of nominations and chosen by distinguished energy experts who are part of the C3E Ambassadors program. Along with the recognition, she will receive a $10,000 cash prize from MITEI for her clean energy work. Other award categories include: innovation and technology development, corporate implementation, policy and advocacy, advancements for the developing world, and education and mentorship. Additionally, the Ambassadors nominated and chose former Honeywell GM Maxine Savitz to be the C3E Lifetime Achievement Award winner.

Read about all of this year’s C3E award winners: http://web.mit.edu/c3e/winners.html

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The U.S. Clean Energy Education & Empowerment (C3E) program is an effort to advance the careers and leadership of professional women in the field of clean energy. The program is part of the international C3E Initiative within the 23-government Clean Energy Ministerial framework. Learn more: http://cleanenergyministerial.org/OurWork/Initiatives/WomeninCleanEnergy

GRID Alternatives is a non-profit organization that brings the benefits of solar technology to low-income communities. Using a barn-raising model, GRID Alternatives leads teams of volunteers and job trainees to install solar power on qualifying homes, providing needed savings for families struggling to make ends meet while preparing workers for jobs in the fast-growing solar industry and cleaning our air. More than 3600 families have benefited from the program to date, saving $100 million in lifetime electricity costs, and more than 11,000 people have received solar training. GRID Alternatives has offices throughout California and in Denver, CO, and will begin serving New York/New Jersey in fall 2013. Learn more at www.gridalternatives.org.