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ABOUT JOSEPH N. DISTEFANO



Joseph N. DiStefano writes this blog to feed his PhillyDeals column, which is printed in the business pages of The Philadelphia Inquirer every Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2010

Energy marketer questions Afghan war

Richard Vague, chief executive of West Philadelphia-based Energy Plus Holdings LLC, says his two-year-old retail electricity supply marketing firm is eagerly awaiting the start of competitive electricity markets in central Pennsylvania this Spring.

Billings totalled \$60 million last year, as Energy Plus signed up consumers and small-business customers in competition with entrenched power companies and other upstarts in New York, Connecticut, and Texas.

Vague, a former top credit card executive at First USA (now Chase) and Barclaycard, says he and President Kevin Kleinschmidt (all managers are equity owners) would like to branch out into other "direct marketing" businesses.

Energy Plus employs 60 at the University City Science Center's new building, 3711 Market St., where it's moving into a 20,000 sq ft space on the top floor from its current 5,000 sq ft suite.

Vague likes 3711, upstairs from the new 3-D printer and other equipment the Center is installing for building tenants and other users.

His own extracurricular activities include this weekend's planned Af-Pak Policy Retreat in Florida. An opponent of the Iraq War and the widened war in Afghanistan, Vague is helping bring a diverse group of war students together.

Among them: CIA veteran turned Georgetown professor Paul R. Pillar; Justin Logan of the libertarian Cato Institute; Marine Corps veteran Michael Patrick Hoh, who resigned from the State Department last fall in protest of Obama's Afghanistan policy; Chicago professor Robert Pape; Harvard professor Stephen Walt; ex-UN official Graciana del Castillo, who wrote the book Rebuilding War-Torn States about her work in Central America and the Balkans; liberal scholar Sherle R. Schenninger of the New American Policy Foundation; Darcy Burner, formerly of Microsoft, now head of the American Progressive Caucus Policy Foundation.

Why Vague the businessman objects to US policy in Central Asia: "We're spending \$100 billion a year in Afghanistan, a country whose gross domestic product is maybe \$23 billion. We could put every man, woman and child on the payroll and reduce our cost 80 percent," Vague told me.

Of course, "it's easy to criticize policy. It's hard to come up with an alternative plan for Afghanistan." That's why he's bringing Afghanistan-watchers together, away from Washington, to talk.

Posted by Joseph N. DiStefano @ 4:15 PM Permalink | Post a comment

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