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Personable Petro-doc Examines Cost of Energy

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One of the things biofuels have going for them is Josh Tickell.

In 1997, the energetic environmentalist hit America's roads in his "Veggie Van," an RV that ran on used cooking oil.

Since then, he's continued a mission to educate and cajole Americans into changing our petro dependency, even when events threatened his environmental evangelism.

After "Fields of Fuel" won the Sundance 2008 audience award, the director re-edited the film to address controversies that arose about the environmental and humanitarian impact of ethanol.

Renamed, reworked and smarter for it, "Fuel" arrives with a fully loaded screening at the Starz FilmCenter tonight (it runs through Thursday). Tickell will be on a panel with Greenprint Denver's Sabrina Williams and Jeff Probst, CEO of Golden-based Blue Sun Biodiesel, after the 7:10 p.m. screening.

Deeply personal and surprisingly personable, "Fuel" begins in Australia. As a boy, Tickell relocated with his family from Down Under to his mother's home state of Louisiana. Life in beautiful if contaminated bayou country made him hyperaware of the petrochemical industry and admittedly hostile to it.

There is plenty of damning material on the oil companies' toxic contributions to local environments. Yet, one of the refreshing traits of this action-nudging documentary is Tickell's willingness to wrestle his own biases.

Tickell and writer Johnny O'Hara make a pragmatic case that one solution can't cure our energy woes. With candor, the doc often lets a nagging question cloud hope: Can energy ever be consequence-free?

For each familiar plunge into disaster — the Iraq war, 9/11, Katrina — there's a more revelatory moment spent with visionaries, local and global. "Fuel" boasts an all-star cast of usual suspects like Sheryl Crow and Woody Harrelson.

But the real stars are folks like Van Jones, founder of Green For All, an organization linking green jobs to poverty eradication. Or Tri-State Biodiesel honcho Brent Baker and his excited tanker driver Wayne Barnes. Or third-generation oil and gas man Gordon LeBlanc, CEO of PetroSun, who is committed to biofuel for the future of his kids and their children.