



Five Minutes With Robert L. Wallace of Bithenergy

By Carrie Wells, **THE BALTIMORE SUN**

Robert L. Wallace's interest in engineering and technology began early as he grew up in the Cherry Hill Homes public housing, and was stoked later at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute.

Now 59, he oversees a bustling mini-empire based in a Mount Vernon rowhome, with an information technology services company, an energy company and a business offering courses for aspiring entrepreneurs.

In a few years, the energy company, Bithenergy, has grown from five employees and \$300,000 in annual revenue to about 30 workers and \$7.28 million. That growth made Bithenergy the No. 1 company on an annual list The Initiative for a Competitive Inner City of the fastest growing urban companies, published recently in Fortune magazine.

Wallace's other two other firms are Bithgroup Technologies, with about 70 employees; and EntreTeach Learning Systems. He's also written eight books, mostly geared toward minority and female entrepreneurs.

At Bithenergy, Wallace's team helps clients like Maryland's Department of General Services and SunTrust Bank see where they can save money on utility bills. He said in a few cases, they found the state government had been double billed for power. The firm also built about 30 megawatts worth of solar farms, including one in west Howard County from which the Columbia Association buys power, and has another 100 megawatts in the pipeline, Wallace said. It specializes in building the solar farms on landfills and brownfield sites, which is more challenging because of restrictions against penetrating a protective barrier on top of the hazardous material.

Wallace said he was gifted in math and science and wanted to put those skills to use to help boost the city of Baltimore and its residents.

"I always thought that technology and entrepreneurship could make a difference for quality of life for people," Wallace said.

Successful businesses in Baltimore will be "critical" as the city seeks to restore its image following April's rioting in the wake of Freddie Gray's death from injuries sustained in police custody, Wallace said.

"As we improve upon our image across the country and the world I think business leaders will have to lead that charge, and I'm prepared to lead that charge as well as I can," he said.

