

A rewarding ride: Visalia Transit inaugurates rewards plan for bus riders

By Eric Woomer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tues., Aug. 3, 2010

A new rewards program for Visalia bus riders will lessen the financial blow for frequent riders like Raul Fierro, who lugs his bag of tools every day from bus stop to bus stop.

The only rider-rewards program offered in the nation will allow riders who purchase the new monthly bus pass to receive more than \$45 worth of discounts at local merchants each month they renew, according to Visalia Transit officials.

"This is a blessing these days," said Fierro, an electrician who uses the bus to get from Visalia to Farmersville. "This card is perfect for people who ride the bus and want a discount for lunch."

Participating merchants include:

- Café 210
- Firkin and Hound
- Subway (Visalia, Goshen, Farmersville)
- Visalia Rescue Mission
- Plaza Park Raceway
- IHOP

There are currently 31 participating merchants, with plans to add more during the next few months. Riders can walk into the businesses and have the money deducted straight from their card.

The \$30 Rider Rewards monthly pass is a plastic card that allows purchasers unlimited rides on Visalia buses and trolleys throughout the month.

Riders may renew the card online.

It was designed to get more people interested in riding the bus.

More than 1.4 million people rode Visalia buses last year. More than 300,000 were monthly pass holders.

"It's our way of saying thank you for riding the bus and sparing the air," said Jessica Blanchfield, marketing agent for Visalia Transit. "We're hoping non-riders or those on the fence will also give transit a try."

The reusable card also gives riders the security of knowing if they lose their card or it's stolen, it can be replaced for free.

"I lost my card last month and had to replace it at full cost," Fierro said. "This is going to save my wife and me a lot of money."

The card is also going to save the city money.

"This not only gives riders a handful of benefits, it also saves the city from printing thousands of paper tickets," said Monte Cox, Visalia transit's manager. "It's a more efficient way to board the bus and is great for the riders."

West Fire 100 percent contained, damage being assessed

By Jason Kotowski, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tues., Aug. 3, 2010

State and federal damage assessment teams are coming to Kern County to determine what government assistance can be authorized for residents impacted by the West Fire near Tehachapi.

The fire, now completely contained, destroyed 23 residences and 41 other structures in the rural Old West Ranch community. A total of 1,658 acres burned, according to the Kern County Fire Department.

Georgianna Armstrong, the county's emergency services manager, said the response of the assessment teams is the first step in getting possible U.S. Small Business Administration assistance for the area. Residents can then apply to get money back for their losses.

The process of determining what assistance can be authorized should be relatively quick -- only a couple of days to a week once the final assessment is complete, Armstrong said. She's also planning, once it's known which agencies will be providing assistance, to set up a center where residents can go and get information from every agency involved.

The damage assessment teams will be conducting the site assessments on Wednesday, she said.

For more information or to make sure your property is added to those that will be assessed, call Kern County Office of Emergency Services at 661-873-2604, or e-mail Armstrong at garnstrong@co.kern.ca.us.

Two men cutting steel pipe sparked the blaze, according to Cal Fire. Daniel Gentle, 47, and Michael Kulikoff, 23, have been cited for misdemeanors.

The county's other, larger, wildfire was also nearly completely contained as of Monday morning. The Bull Fire north of Kernville was at 95 percent containment and had burned 16,442 acres, according to a news release from the California Interagency Incident Management Team.

Eight residences and six outbuilding were destroyed by the blaze, which is human-caused and still under investigation, the news release said. As of 9 a.m. Monday, Mountain Highway 99 was re-opened.