

Grant funding purchase of electric vehicles

By Mattos Newspapers

Gustine Press-Standard, Friday, February 10, 2012

NEWMAN – The city's vehicle fleet is about to get a little greener.

Newman landed a \$100,000 grant from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District which will be used to purchase eight electric vehicles.

Director of Public Works Garner Reynolds said the city placed orders earlier this week for four GEM vehicles, two John Deere Gators and two Polaris Rangers.

"We have a nice fleet of compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles, but these will be the first electric ones," Reynolds explained. "Some time this spring you will see them rolling around the city."

The small, battery-powered utility vehicles will be distributed among city departments, he noted.

City Hall will get a four-seat GEM car for staff to buzz around town in.

The other three GEMs will each be two-seaters with a utility bed, Reynolds said, with one assigned to the police department and two used by public works for tasks such as making the rounds to read meters – rather than using the traditional pickup trucks.

"We are getting light bars on the GEMS so they can be used on the streets," Reynolds pointed out. "I've driven the GEMs before, and think they'll be a nice asset for the city."

The Ranger and Gator utility vehicles will be used in parks and at the wastewater treatment plant, he noted.

The smaller, lighter vehicles are often more conducive to work in parks than full-size trucks, Reynolds added. "The Gators have wider tires that will be easier on the turf. We think they will be very functional," the public works director related.

The electric vehicles can be recharged at any 110 outlet, he said, but the grant terms require the city to designate charging stations.

With a top speed of about 25 miles an hour, the vehicles are designed for short trips in town rather than the open highways.

The city must also commit to maintaining the electric vehicles for at least three years.

"We will definitely be able to put them to good use," Reynolds commented. "They will be handy in our parks, and also just for general running around. They will help us lower our fuel expenses, and it helps the environment."

The city added about \$7,000 to the grant funds to complete the purchase of the electric vehicles.

CNG vehicles already in use

The electric vehicles will not be the first alternative additions to the city's fleet.

Reynolds said the city fleet currently has three cars, three pickups, a flatbed and a lift truck powered by compressed natural gas.

"We've been very happy with the vehicles. Our fuel costs have dropped dramatically. Whenever possible we try to utilize the CNG vehicles because of that," he told Mattos Newspapers.

The drawback with the CNG vehicles has been the city's slow-fill station, which sometimes would take hours to refill the larger trucks.

The city is remedying that with plans for a fast-fill station which is expected to reduce the fueling time from hours to minutes.

Reynolds said the city has been so impressed with the CNG vehicles that it plans to apply for grant funding to purchase two more – a dump truck and a vacuum truck.

Wine, dine and charge your electric car at St. Jorge Winery

Jennifer M. Howell

Lodi News Sentinel, Friday, February 10, 2012

St. Jorge Winery, nestled between sprawling rows of vineyards and languishing trees, is offering something no one else within 60 miles of Lodi can — an electric car charging station.

The station, which is currently charging a Chevrolet Volt, will be on display at Lodi's Wine & Chocolate Weekend on Saturday and Sunday.

This newest addition to the piazza-style winery is just a piece of the ever-expanding environmentally conscious efforts of owner Vern Vierra.

"This is the wave of the future," he said. "We want to add more of these so that there are multiple stations for everyone to use ... (the Wine & Chocolate Weekend) is a great place to show this off."

Vierra, whose Portuguese family has been growing food and making wine for hundreds of years, he was instilled with a respect for the land he toils.

In fact, the winery he now owns and operates used to be his father's dairy farm.

And along with preserving the land for future generations to use, Vierra has created conservation efforts with his wine to ensure he and his customers get the most out of his product.

For example, Vierra purchased an evaporated cooler to keep his wine in the winery's basement a cool 50 degrees before it is ready to be bottled.

Keeping his Portuguese wines at room temperature could result in the loss of a gallon of wine per barrel, but with this energy-saving option, Vierra only loses about a pint of wine per barrel.

The evaporated cooler also saves Vierra a lot of money — he says he only has to pay \$15 a month in utility fees.

In addition to his electric car and charger display, Vierra also uses an electric forklift.

The forklift has a battery similar to the one in your car, but bigger and stronger.

The forklifts are usually designed to last for at least one standard shift before needing a recharge.

Vierra particularly likes to use his electric forklift because it is ideal for indoor use, like at a winery, as it does not generate emissions.

"We really are trying to do something different here," he said. "We are saving money and we are doing something that is environmentally conscious."

BART agrees to study extension to Livermore

The Associated Press

In the Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, Feb. 11, 2012

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — The Bay Area Rapid Transit Agency has agreed to look into the possibility of extending train service about 5 miles to Livermore.

BART's Board of Directors on Thursday unanimously approved moving forward with environmental studies and a ridership plan for the \$1.1 billion project.

But they also requested a closer look at express buses and other alternatives to extending BART and asked for information about how the extension could impact maintenance and improvements to the existing train system.

The extension would run from BART's current end point at the Dublin-Pleasanton station down the middle of Interstate 580 to a planned freeway interchange.

Supporters say the project would ease traffic congestion and pollution in the area. Critics say BART should focus on maintaining and improving its existing lines.

Calif asks for stay of low-carbon fuel ruling

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Friday, February 10, 2012

SAN FRANCISCO -- California officials are asking a federal judge to allow work to resume on implementation of the state's first-in-the-nation mandate for low-carbon vehicle fuels.

The California Air Resources Board on Friday filed a request for a stay in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, asking the court to allow work to resume while it appeals a lower court decision to halt the program.

The board is appealing a December ruling by Fresno-based U.S. District Court Judge Lawrence O'Neill, which blocked implementation of a first-in-the-nation low-carbon fuel standard.

O'Neill wrote that the rule violates the U.S. Constitution's commerce clause by discriminating against crude oil and biofuels producers located outside California.

The mandate requires all vehicles' fuels, on average, to be 10 percent less carbon-intensive by 2020 than gasoline is now.