

It's official

By Rick Elkins

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GreenPower breaks ground on plant

GreenPower Motor Company didn't just break ground on Friday for its electric-power bus manufacturing plant — it laid down roots.

The owners of the Vancouver, Canada-based company all expressed they had found a partner in the City of Porterville and they couldn't be happier setting up shop, the first major green energy company to locate in Porterville.

GreenPower Chairman Fraser Atkinson made it very clear the company had found a home in Porterville, not just a location.

After telling how helpful and open the city staff was from the very first day they came into town in late 2015, to today, Atkinson said, "It was that kind of commitment and dedication that solidified" their decision to place their plant here.

Phillip Aldridge, company CEO who will head up operations in Porterville and one of the company's founders and principal owners, told a crowd of more than 100 city officials, civic leaders, business people and citizens, "It's been a long, long time in coming," he said of the company that is just five years old.

"We're excited," he said, followed by saying he has moved his family from Canada to Springville where his wife will run the soon-to-be-opened Springville Inn.

Vice Mayor Brian Ward welcomed GreenPower to the city, "especially to celebrate the unique partnership that has been formed between GreenPower and the city.

GreenPower will build a 145,000 square-foot plant. It also plans a two-story, 6,000-square foot office at the same site on Hope Drive at the Porterville Municipal Airport. There, it will assemble all-electric buses ranging from 30 to 40 feet, including a beautiful double-decker bus that can hold 100 passengers.

The company also plans to build school buses, a new product line its announced this year, and Atkinson said they are also rolling out a shuttle bus which will come in 30-foot and 36.5-foot lengths.

Officials have said the company, which already began limited operations in a hangar across the street from its plant side, will employ about 60 people once the first phase of the new plant is completed. It will employ more as it finishes phases 2 and 3.

On top of GreenPower, Atkinson said they hope as many of their overseas suppliers come to Porterville as well. City officials confirmed a few companies have already begun looking for sites.

Atkinson said Friday he knows one supplier is looking and that supplier would be "a huge help to them."

Friday was a day of celebration in more ways than one. As part of the festivities, the California Air Resources Board presented the city with a ceremonial check for \$9.5 million, which will pay for Porterville to become the first all-electric city transit system in the nation.

"The Air Resources Board is very excited to be presenting this check to Porterville," said CARB board member Alex Sherriffs, a physician in Fowler who is also a member of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

He said the electric-power buses are "especially important" in the San Joaquin Valley, home to some of the worst air quality in the nation.

"Tens of thousands emergency room visits and hundreds of premature births," are caused by bad air quality, he noted.

With the buses, and hundreds more to come throughout the Valley, Sherriffs said, "We'll be breathing easier in the months to come."

Sayed Sadredin, Valley Air District Air Pollution Control officer/executive director, said Porterville has become the example for green jobs in the Central Valley.

“What’s doable in Porterville sets an example of what can be done in the San Joaquin Valley,” he said, congratulating both the city and GreenPower.

The grant will pay for 10 40-foot electric buses, with GreenPower providing an 11th bus for backup. That first bus could be delivered as early as late fall, assembled in the hangar before the plant is completed.

“Today is the start of a brand new endeavor of GreenPower and the City of Porterville working together,” said Brendan Riley, company president.