

## **Track backers heading down stretch**

By Scott Jason  
Merced Sun-Star  
Oct. 20, 2006

ATWATER -- The Riverside Motorsports Park chairman urged residents to inundate Merced County supervisors with e-mails and phone calls to show their support as the controversial project's final vote looms less than two months away.

About 120 racers and fans went to the Atwater Community Center for the park's "Racer's Night 3," which updated proponents on the project and the process to win county approval.

Meanwhile, the leader of the citizens group opposed to the project said members will continue to lobby county residents as to why they should oppose the 1,200-acre racing park, located northeast of Atwater.

The citizens group argues the effects on traffic and air will be massive, ruining the quality of life for Merced County citizens, while the park supporters say independent studies show the impacts will be minimal to nonexistent.

The Merced County Board of Supervisors will decide who to believe when it casts its final vote to approve or deny the project on Dec. 12.

The park also is trying to convince Foster Farms that the park will not disturb the chickens it raises next to the raceway's southeast corner.

John Condren, park chairman and CEO, said he started planning the park, which could see some weekend attendance as high as 50,000, more than six years ago.

"We're real close (to being done). Enough of the warm-ups," he said. "Let's go racing."

The hour-and-a-half presentation detailed how Condren envisions the park bringing jobs, entertainment and economic benefit to Atwater, Merced and the county.

"I don't like Merced's motto. A gateway is just something you pass through," Condren said. "How about 'Yosemite and more' or 'Yosemite: The Gateway to Merced.'"

The environmental and economic studies were done by outside agencies, Condren said, and show that there will be no significant impact to water, traffic or air.

The 10,861-page environmental report, which evaluates the project's effects, is about 32 inches high and rested in two stacks on a table during the meeting.

"If anyone questions whether we did our homework," Condren said. "It's the most studied project in Merced County and the most studied motorsports project in the world."

Condren said the studies show that about 1,250 on-site jobs will be created at the eight racing venue park, generating about \$70 million annually in payroll.

"That's will be spent here," he said. "That's what's going to attract the Macy's."

Condren said the project backers have tried to resolve the raceway's noise impact with Foster Farms, but keep getting blocked by the company's attorney.

"We are trying to be real good corporate neighbors," he said.

One man at the meeting said he's stopped buying Foster Farms chicken because of its issue with the proposed park.

About 150 will be full-time RMP jobs and 525 will be part-time jobs, Condren said. The rest of the 600 jobs will come from the 50 to 75 business that will open in the 650,000 square foot industrial business complex at the park.

However, it's those part-time jobs, among other things, that makes Judith Doucette, head of Merced County Residents Against the Raceway, call the project "a sham."

"You throw out these grandiose ideas and people just say 'Oh, wow. Yeah.'" she said. "The gullibility of the people of Merced County can be overwhelming at times."

Most of the jobs are going to be part-time and entry-level without benefits, she said.

"We need entry level jobs? Entry level to what? Selling hot-dogs or tickets?" she said. "We don't have jobs that give people the ability to pay mortgages."

Doucette and the group's hundred members did not attend the meeting because they knew it was specifically for supporters.

Throughout the fight about the project, Doucette said the two groups have been respectful of private meetings.

Concerns about the project still have not been adequately addressed in the final environmental report, she said.

"We vacillate between being the worst or the second worst (for air quality)," Doucette said. "If you add one car, you are not helping it."

She said she started fighting this project expecting a six month battle, only for it to be going on for more than three years.

The most frustrating part of the fight, she said, is when park representatives are allotted three hours to make presentations to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, while the opponents get minutes to speak.

"We citizens, whose lives are going to be affected forever, get five minutes," she said. "That just galls us. That is totally unfair."

Sandy Sorge of Merced went to a naval base in Coronado for a race with her two daughters, who started helping with events when they were 7 and 10 years old.

Opponents are unreasonably alarmed by the project and don't see the benefits to the sport, she said.

Race cars are cleaner than cars that are driven on the street, and the noise from the track is quieter than what people would expect, she said.

"I think they need to come to a track and be a witness before they speak negative," she said.

## **Feinstein visits 'roots'**

### **Senator retraces father's footsteps in Taft**

BY JENNY SHEARER, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Oct. 20, 2006

Sen. Dianne Feinstein's Thursday visit to Taft was a homecoming of sorts.

Feinstein told students at Taft Union High School.

Her school appearance and later luncheon at The Fort in Taft with community leaders involved the personal and political elements of her life.

Her father, Leon Goldman, grew up in Taft and graduated from the high school in 1922.

The school was built in 1911, so the senior senator from California traveled the same paths as her beloved father many years ago.

School administrators gave her a copy of her father's senior portrait and a list of his accomplishments, which included athletics, acting and debating.

The discovery of oil in Taft lured the Goldman family from the Bay Area, after they had survived the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Leon Goldman was one of 11 children, and one of the lucky sons in the family to go to school.

From Taft, he went on to study medicine at the University of California, Berkeley, and had a successful career.

"Much of his values came from here," said Feinstein, 73, who later acknowledged that much of what she is today she owes to her father.

Like her father advised her, she urged students to "work to their long suit, not their short suit," to discover their passions and pursue them.

Her physician father wanted Feinstein to study medicine, too, but she got a "D" in genetics at Stanford University.

"Losing is really hard, but you've got to come back," she said.

She was the first female mayor of San Francisco after Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk were assassinated in 1978, what she called "the worst year of my life."

Student Jorge Mejia was surprised to learn Feinstein's father "came from a small town and grew up to be so important."

The Democrat expects to win her re-election campaign; the state's first female senator went to Washington, D.C., in 1992. [Feinstein is working on legislation to boost vehicle mileage standards and energy efficiency. She told students global warming is a big problem "because of the dependence on the very thing that made this community what it is today."](#)

At the luncheon, Feinstein was asked about the Patriot Act and the war in Iraq.

A political centrist, Feinstein believes in using diplomacy with nations such as North Korea, Iran and Syria, and thinks it's time for Donald Rumsfeld, secretary of defense, to be dismissed.

Mayor Cliff Thompson proclaimed Oct. 19 "Senator Dianne Feinstein Day" and gave her a key to the city.

She was touched.

"I do a lot of different events. I will tell you being here is a day I will not forget," she said.

## **16 employers in county boast commuter-friendly workplaces**

By Michael Kinsman

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

October 19, 2006

Sixteen San Diego County employers were named yesterday to a list of best workplaces for commuters by the San Diego Association of Governments.

The employers were among a list of companies and organizations recognized nationally for offering workers superior commuting benefits.

The program is based on standards developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is intended to encourage commuting options. The EPA estimates that congestion created by commuting causes 3.7 billion hours of lost productivity annually and \$63.1 billion in wasted time and fuel.

Heading the list of San Diego employers was Qualcomm, which ranked No. 5 nationally among Fortune 500 companies. Only 133 of the Fortune 500 companies made the list this year.

Among the benefits Qualcomm offers are transit subsidies, bike and motorcycle parking, membership in a car-sharing network, shuttles to trolley and train stations and a 25 percent subsidy for employees who use van or car pools.

"I think the employers are very aware of how commuting affects their employees," said Allison Richards-Evensen, manager of SANDAG's RideLink commuter program. "They know that developing commuting programs can decrease stress on their employees, increase timeliness in reporting to work and reduce the financial impact of long-distance commuting."

Last year, six local employers made the list. In addition to Qualcomm, repeat employers on the list were Becton, Dickinson & Co.; Flexcar Southern California; SANDAG; the San Diego Air Pollution Control District; and Sony Online Entertainment.

Local employers on the list for the first time: Biosite; California Bank & Trust; Catalyst Advancement; the city of San Diego; Daniel Benson & Associates; REMEC Defense & Space; SAIC; TKG Consulting Engineers; the University of San Diego; and Watkins Manufacturing.

To qualify for best workplaces designation, employers must provide several benefits from a list that includes providing commuting information to employees; car pool, bus or train subsidies; cash payments in lieu of free parking; a telecommuting program; car and van pool incentives; showers and lockers for bikers or walkers; and incentives for living near work.

TKG Consulting Engineers in Sorrento Valley started its commuter program six months ago, said Juliet Adams, who handles human resource issues for the company, which employs 73.

"We know that we have a lot of employees who travel long distances to come to work," she said. "We have people who live in Oceanside and Temecula, who can commute up to an hour and a half."

TKG allows flex hours, letting workers start at any time between 6 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. or to work nine-hour days four days a week and four hours on the fifth workday.

It also provides a 50 percent subsidy for workers who take bus, trolley or van pools to work. Employees who carpool are entered into a monthly drawing for a \$50 subsidy.

"We know about traffic and congestion, and we want to do what we can to help our employees deal with it," Adams said.

### **Hybrid vans with a power cord**

#### **Dodge tests small fleet of Sprinters for delivery**

Jim Motavalli, New York Times

In the San Francisco Chronicle, Friday, Oct. 20, 2006

Are there plug-in hybrid vehicles in America's future? Such hybrids could travel 10 to 20 additional miles on battery power alone, but until recently automakers have said -- more or less unanimously -- that it was not practical to add a larger battery pack and plug-in chargers to hybrid vehicles because of the added weight, complexity and cost.

The public is already confused about hybrids, they say, with many people still believing that these cars (whose batteries are charged by their internal-combustion engines) need to be plugged in. So now hybrids really will have a power cord?

Maybe, says DaimlerChrysler. The company recently showed in New York the first vehicle in its small test fleet of Dodge Sprinter delivery vans with plug-in-hybrid power trains. The Sprinters can drive 20 miles on batteries alone, powered by a 70-kilowatt electric motor. The three Sprinters currently in the United States (built in Germany with either diesel or gasoline engines) are the vanguard concept vehicles in a four-truck fleet; another three dozen will enter service around the world.

This does not necessarily mean that DaimlerChrysler will make plug-in production Sprinters for sale, but the company appears to be warming to the concept.

Other companies are mulling the idea, too.

Ford Motor's chairman, William Clay Ford Jr., said in May that his company was "keenly looking at" the technology. At Toyota, Dave Hermance, executive engineer for advanced technology vehicles, confirmed that the company has started a research and development program for plug-ins. "But we believe the batteries are not ready for production," he added.

According to a Bloomberg News report in June, General Motors is also developing a plug-in hybrid. Even Google.org, a charitable for-profit company set up by the popular search engine provider, said it would create its own plug-in system.

A June report by AllianceBernstein, an investment management firm in New York, titled "The Emergence of Hybrid Vehicles," concluded that "Plug-in hybrid vehicles are likely to arrive as an extension of current hybrid technology." The fuel-efficiency gains, the report said, "would be enormous for those people who typically drive only short distances each day."

Plug-ins, like all hybrids, excel in stop-and-go duty. And their ability to make those runs on batteries alone makes them ideal for the delivery tasks envisioned for the Sprinter project.

The Electric Power Research Institute, a trade association for utilities, estimates that a plug-in hybrid would consume 2,000 to 2,500 kilowatt-hours of grid electricity annually. So wouldn't vehicles like the plug-in hybrid Sprinter simply transfer their pollution source from the tailpipe to the smokestack of a coal-burning power plant?

That depends on the source of electric power, according to a report released last month by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, a nonprofit energy policy group. The council concluded that a plug-in version of the Toyota Prius could reduce carbon dioxide emissions by a third compared with today's Prius hybrid, but only if its batteries were charged with California electricity -- generated mainly from relatively clean sources.

"One of the key determinants is whether the electricity is generated using coal," Jim Kliesch, a co-author of the report, said in an interview. The report says that in a part of the Midwest dominated by coal-burning power plants, a plug-in Prius would generate 1 percent more carbon dioxide. "Our position is that overselling plug-ins to policymakers or to John Q. Public has the potential of causing disenchantment with the technology," Kliesch said.

But the plug-in concept has long been championed by environmentalists and green-minded entrepreneurs, some of whom have added battery packs and chargers to existing hybrids like the Prius and the Ford Escape. On short commuting runs, these cars wouldn't need to start their gasoline engines, allowing their champions to claim very high potential economy figures. But some homemade plug-in hybrids have had problems adapting to the software of the cars' sophisticated on-board computers.

"This DaimlerChrysler introduction is the beginning of the automakers fulfilling our dreams," said Felix Kramer, a founder of CalCars.org, which has championed plug-in hybrids and helped build prototypes. "It's very encouraging."

The van of dreams is a conventional-looking Sprinter, familiar to Americans as a tall Dodge or Freightliner utility vehicle used as a passenger bus and, without rear seats, as a delivery truck. In Europe, it is badged as a Mercedes-Benz. Departures from factory specifications include a plug-in recharging port on the right side of the van's nose, a small switch on the dashboard that shifts the vehicle into electric-only mode and a 350-pound, 14-kilowatt-hour lithium-ion battery pack peeking out from under the flat floor. And, of course, Hybrid Sprinter lettering on its flanks.

The Sprinter drew a crowd to the lobby of the Solaire apartment tower in Battery Park City, chosen because it is the first green high-rise residential building in the United States (with its own wastewater plant and photovoltaic panels).

The Sprinter project is a team effort involving DaimlerChrysler, the New York Power Authority and the Electric Power Research Institute, among others; representatives of each were on hand for the introduction. "The plug-in hybrid is a good application for fleets, and terrific for New York City," said Timothy Carey, president and chief executive of the power authority, who drives an Escape Hybrid.

The officials stood under an awning and looked on as I became the first journalist in the United States to drive the Sprinter.

I twisted the key, and was amazed at how quiet the truck was. Unfortunately, it wasn't running. To the consternation of almost everyone there, this would-be paragon of New York fleet use had failed to start.

A German engineer quickly connected a laptop computer to troubleshoot the failure, and concluded that the van's motor controller was not functioning. Unfortunately, he couldn't fix the problem quickly and the demonstration drive was postponed.

According to a DaimlerChrysler spokesman, Nick Cappa, the car was running half an hour later. But I didn't connect with it again until several days later, in White Plains, where the power authority has its headquarters. The facilities also include a charging station, which takes six to eight hours to replenish the Sprinter's lithium-ion batteries. The paddle charger fits into a slot in the front fender and is pushed downward to start the electricity flowing. The charging system is designed with safety in mind: the electrical contacts are not exposed until the paddle is inserted into the car.

John Markowitz, a power authority engineer with temporary custody of the hybrid Sprinter, explained that this van, with a gasoline engine, was destined for California, where regulators are not friendly to diesels.

That van's lithium-ion batteries offer the same amount of energy storage as the nickel-metal-hydride packs in the other version, but weigh half as much. But lithium-ion batteries pose some cost and durability challenges: Both Apple Computer and Dell have recalled lithium-ion laptop computer batteries because of an overheating hazard.

The Sprinter is relatively simple to drive, with an automatic transmission that offers manual shifting. It handles well for a large vehicle. The driver can choose either hybrid or electric-only mode, with the latter providing the strongest initial acceleration.

The 2.3-liter gasoline engine in my test vehicle revved to 5,000 rpm without providing much forward motion up hills, but the electric motor's abundance of low-speed torque pulled it away smoothly -- and with much less noise than a conventional van.

The engine engagement is not quite as seamless as it is on the production Prius or Escape, but as in those cars, the engine shuts off neatly at stoplights. The alternate version, with a 2.7-liter turbocharged diesel engine, is likely to move out quicker.

In the first phase of testing, Sprinters will be deployed in New York, Kansas City and Los Angeles. The Kansas City and Los Angeles vans will go into service at utility companies. The Sprinter to undergo a three-year test in New York will be a diesel version with nickel-metal-hydride batteries. It will be used by the New York Times to deliver newspapers from a printing plant in College Point, Queens, to routes in five boroughs, and to haul newspapers to schools, said Mark Coleman, director of distribution for the Times. He said the van was likely to be delivered in February or March.

The Sprinter will have company. Claus Tritt, senior manager for commercial vehicles, said DaimlerChrysler would also field a second plug-in hybrid on a revised platform, though he declined to comment further. "It will have wheels," he confided.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Letter to the Editor, Friday, Oct. 20, 2006:](#)

### **Measure R would fund more than road projects**

The recent news coverage on the need for more -- and better -- bike paths in Visalia and the county prompts me to write to remind voters that Measure R will generate nearly \$45 million for bike paths.

This measure on the Nov. 7 ballot will make possible new and enhanced bike paths and trails throughout Visalia, Tulare and Porterville.

These are projects that likely would not be funded without this infusion of local funding.

I also wanted to set the record straight on bus funding.

Measure R does in fact include millions of dollars to enhance our transit system in Visalia, Porterville, Dinuba, Tulare County, Tulare, Lindsay, Woodlake, Exeter and Farmersville.

The supporters of Measure R and the authors of the Tulare County Expenditure Plan ([www.tularecog.org](http://www.tularecog.org)) recognize that times have changed.

We have to do what we can to encourage alternative forms of transportation and do our part to clean the air. The Tulare County Asthma Coalition has endorsed Measure R because of our efforts to reduce congestion (which reduces emissions) and encourage bicycling.

The reality is, however, that we still need roads widened and interchanges improved. Measure R will fund projects such as Road 80, Highways 65 and 190, Caldwell from Highway 99 to Exeter and interchanges on Highways 198 and 99. Without Measure R, many of these projects could take decades to fund and build.

Measure R is our opportunity to do things right in Tulare County.

For information on the Yes and R Committee, visit [www.voterroadrepair.com](http://www.voterroadrepair.com).

BOB STOCKER  
Measure R Campaign Coordinator

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the October 18<sup>th</sup> health and air pollution symposium in Fresno and the call for all Valley residents and industry to voluntarily reduce polluting emissions. For more information, contact Maricela at (559) 230-5849.]

### **Analizan contaminación desde punto de vista médico en California**

**Sin embargo el Simposio sobre Contaminación y Salud advirtió que falta todavía que los residentes domiciliarios e industriales del Valle reduzcan voluntariamente todo tipo de emisiones contaminantes**

Noticiero Latino, Aire Libre, California

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, October 19, 2006

Médicos del Valle de San Joaquín en la región central norte de California advirtieron que los actuales esfuerzos por reducir la contaminación del aire son reconocibles pero todavía insuficientes.

El Valle es la segunda región más contaminada en el país después de Los Ángeles y sin quemas de bosques y uso de leña como calefacción invernal se ha de reducir el impacto de la contaminación en la salud.

Sin embargo el Simposio sobre Contaminación y Salud advirtió que falta todavía que los residentes domiciliarios e industriales del Valle reduzcan voluntariamente todo tipo de emisiones contaminantes.