

Electric cars on parade : A national eco event comes to Santa Barbara

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Michel Saint-Sulpice of Montecito has had his electric vehicle, a white Nissan Leaf, for almost a year now.

"I love my car. I am so happy with it and am so glad I bought it," said Mr. Saint-Sulpice.

On Sunday, the 64-year-old, eco-conscious Frenchman will be one of 30 local electric vehicle owners in Santa Barbara's first National Plug In parade.

Besides the parade, the festivities include test drives of the latest electric vehicles, a tailgate party and a ribbon-cutting at the site of the city's new electric vehicle charging station at the Santa Barbara Harbor.

"I love to show off my car and answer questions about it. I want to participate in educating people about these cars," Mr. Saint-Sulpice said.

Santa Barbara is one of 62 cities participating in the National Plug In event, which is in its second year. The event celebrates and promotes the use of electric vehicles.

Considering the fact that the first Earth Day celebration was held in Santa Barbara in 1970, the event, according to Mayor Helene Schneider, is a natural fit for the city.

"Santa Barbara is the birthplace of the modern environmental movement and it only makes sense that the city continue to embrace cutting-edge technology that reduces our dependence on fossil fuels," said Ms. Schneider.

The mayor, along with Rep. Lois Capps, D-Santa Barbara, will be present for the event that kicks off at 11 a.m. in the Harbor parking lot, where a ribbon-cutting will be held at noon for two of the city's new electric vehicle charging stations, the last of eight recently installed by the city.

"All of the public charging stations will allow tourists and business travelers to charge up their vehicles while they shop, play and work in Santa Barbara," said Michael Chiacos, transportation manager for the Community Environmental Council, which is hosting the event along with the city of Santa Barbara.

Santa Barbara is considered one of the early adopters of electric vehicle technology, according to the CEC, which estimates there are 100 EV owners in the city and 500 in the Central Coast.

The organization is part a group called "Plug In Central Coast" which has already installed 100 charging stations.

The Santa Barbara event is expected to attract locals who are considering making the switch from oil to clean electricity and want more information.

"Electric vehicles are freeing Americans from the gas pump and volatile gas prices and the word is getting out they are more fun to drive," Mr. Chiacos said.

Local car dealers will provide test drives for the Chevrolet Volt, Nissan Leaf and the new Toyota Plug-in Prius. A food truck will be on site.

Mr. Saint-Sulpice doesn't know what he is more excited about — getting to know other electric car owners or introducing the public to what he sees as the future of transportation.

"I believe the sun can power all of our energy needs for the whole Earth. It's up to us to come up with the technology and we have done that," he said.

The ride-and-drives and tailgate party begin at 11 a.m. The ribbon-cutting is at noon and the parade begins at 1 p.m. at the Harbor, continuing down Cabrillo Boulevard and then up State Street to the Arlington Theatre.

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Electric vehicle owner Michel Saint-Sulpice will participate in Santa Barbara's first National Plug In parade Sunday.
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