EV stations open in Solvang

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The first three stations in what is expected to be a network of public electric vehicle charging stations throughout the county are now open in Solvang.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by government officials and environmental group representatives took place Thursday morning at the Veterans Memorial Building, 1940 Mission Drive, one of three locations in the city now equipped with charging stations.

Parking is free in Solvang, and officials expect motorists will pay under $2 per hour to charge their cars.

With tourism being the foremost industry in the Danish-themed town, Mayor Jim Richardson said the charging stations are vital to local businesses.

"We are becoming ecologically sensitive of pollution," Mr. Richardson said. "All the businesses here are supporters of the stations. It will bring more visitors to the town and the residents who have electric vehicles."

All of Solvang's stations are open round the clock and each has two charging ports. In addition to the veteran building, other locations are city parking lot 1 at 1776 Mission Drive and city parking lot 3 at 485 Aliso Road.

Fees are based on each vehicle, according to Michael Chicas, transportation specialist with the Community Environmental Council. But the average cost will be about $1.25 to $2 per hour. The city is allowed to set the charges, Mr. Chicas said, which will be used to recoup the cost of electricity used.

Mr. Chicas said there is a revolutionary change in personal transportation, with a focus on clean and sustainable energy.

"Electric vehicles achieve 30 to 40 percent better mileage in comparison to gas-powered vehicles, which is about 100 miles per gallon equivalent," Mr. Chicas said. "It has been possible due to the advances in battery technology, but the charging infrastructure is behind."

"The charging stations are necessary to support the vehicles," he said. "Without the charging infrastructure, the vehicles cannot be used."

"It feels good, it makes economical sense," he said. "It's astounding for the environment and the range improves, acceptance will be greater."

Stations paid for without use of public funds

At left, Mayor Jim Richardson touts the new electric vehicle charging stations, which can be found by following the white and green signs shown at center. At right, a Chevrolet Volt at one of three new public charging stations in Solvang.

"It's a great day for Solvang," Mr. Richardson said. "It's a great day for the environment."

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The Charging Station Network, according to a press release, is the largest network of independently owned charging stations in the world, providing information to electric vehicle drivers such as charge cost management, trip planning and how to operate stations.

The average for each station is about $10,000. Mr. Whitney said it took about a year to install the stations in Solvang and the city made sure the money was spent well.

Following Solvang, the county will soon begin taking steps to expand the network, with three charging stations already planned for Santa Maria, Lompoc, Santa Barbara, Goleta and Carpinteria, joining more than 4,000 stations throughout the U.S.

Dave Van Nuim, director of the county Air Pollution Control District, said the popularity of electric vehicles is taking off like rockets from Vandenberg Air Force Base.