

Schools: Tulare County students' talents recognized

Local youths' artwork will be displayed in calendar

Visalia Times Delta, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2012

Daisy Ortiz, Arieana Gutierrez and Aneliz Moreno, all of Tulare, and Cesar Andrade of Woodlake will all have their original artwork displayed in the 2013 Healthy Air Living calendar.

The annual English and Spanish publication features artwork from 15 students in the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Each month in the full-color calendar illustrates a clean-air message, such as "Be cool and carpool" and "Healthy air makes our fruit grow healthy."

Modesto fourth-grader Julia Shannon's artwork graces the cover. The calendars are distributed to local schools and various organizations across the Valley.

Here is a list of the other students who will have their artwork featured in the calendar:

- Phoebe Southimath, grade 7, Lathrop
- Elizabeth Leung, grade 5, Bakersfield
- Juliana Velasquez, grade 8, Clovis
- Celine Chhit, grade 3, Fresno
- Angelle Jaquez, grade 6, Madera
- Alma Barboza, grade 4, Atwater
- Annel Mercado, grade 5, Stockton
- Nikolle Sanchis, grade 6, Lathrop
- A.J. Presto, grade 4, Modesto
- Haley Lorca, grade 6, Lemoore

To reserve a copy of the calendar, email public.education@valleyair.org or pick one up at any Valley Air Pollution District office. Office phone numbers are 230-6000 (Fresno) and 661-392-5500 (Bakersfield).

All-electric mass transit rolling into town

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2012

STOCKTON - The doors slide open Star Trek-style, and you step aboard the softly humming passenger bus.

Wow, you tell the driver, that all-electric engine sure is quiet.

"No, that's the air conditioning," he says.

Well, then, when do you plan to start this bus?

"Oh, it's already running," he says. "The air conditioning is the loudest part."

For the first time since trolleys clanged through the streets of Stockton before World War II, all-electric mass transit is rolling into town.

Blessed with a \$2.5 million state grant, the San Joaquin Regional Transit District will soon add two 35-foot electric buses to its fleet.

For two weeks district officials have tested a bus identical to the pair being manufactured on the East Coast. You might have spotted the test bus on its jaunts around town: It's curvier, glassier and smoother than your standard box-shaped bus, and the phrase "Eco-Drive" is stamped across one of the windows.

"It's pretty nifty," said district fleet manager Chris Durant, who doubled as a driver during a test-run last week.

The ride is as smooth as the look.

Sure, the bus still jolts and bounces over bumpy city streets. But the difference is obvious when you slow to a stop at a red light and hear nothing but the noises of the outside world.

The San Joaquin district was a pioneer in the shift to cleaner hybrid buses, purchasing them as early as 2004. All of the 120 buses in the fleet are to be replaced with hybrids by the end of 2013, said district spokesman Paul Rapp.

Now the district is the first in the San Joaquin Valley to go after electric buses. If more funding can be secured, the district would like to eventually purchase up to five, Rapp said.

Electric vehicles aren't new - other varieties are made right here in Stockton, at Electric Vehicles International.

But the limited range and high cost of batteries have so far made it difficult to market electric buses for mass transit.

That's starting to change. The manufacturer of Stockton's new buses, South Carolina-based Proterra, just last month announced \$23 million in venture funding to advance into even more cities.

How does its technology work?

Returning from a route, drivers will pull into the downtown Stockton terminal and nudge their buses beneath a charger that hangs overhead like a light pole.

While passengers exit, the charger lowers onto the top of the bus and slides into place. Electrical current runs through a tangle of wires to batteries in the bowels of the bus.

In as much time as it takes the driver to step inside the terminal and grab a cup of coffee, the bus is ready to run another route. A 10-minute charge allows for about two hours of driving.

The district will save on fuel. It'll pay more for power, but the district says it's working with Pacific Gas and Electric Co. on a deal to avoid peak daytime rates. A similar arrangement has already been made by the Foothill Transit in Southern California, the first district in the state to use electric buses for mass transit.

A standard bus chugs along at a rate of less than 4 miles per gallon; these electric buses run on the energy equivalent of anywhere from 17 to 29 miles per gallon. In all, Proterra says one of its electric buses should save operators \$300,000 over the 12-year life of the vehicle.

Going electric should also help the Valley curb its pollution problem - although the environmental benefits of zero-emission vehicles are diminished if the power to fuel them comes from coal-fired power plants someplace else.

The new buses are notable for more than their batteries.

They're a little smaller and lighter, weighing about 20 percent to 40 percent less than a standard bus. That's in part because the new models have a fiberglass shell melded with lightweight balsa wood - a 1 inch exterior that company officials say is remarkably strong.

And, of course, these buses will have no tailpipes.

Not that the folks who step aboard next spring, when the buses hit the streets, will notice the small details.

They might notice that these buses have rear windows - which in recent decades have mostly been eliminated on passenger buses to make room for air conditioning units (on Proterra buses, those units are mounted on the roof).

Riders might also notice that the doors slide open from the side instead of parting from the middle, said district grants manager George Lorente. Just like the starship Enterprise.

"I think the look is going to be the first thing that hits people," Lorente said. "And yes, they're a little more quiet."

Growers, county staff differ over how to address oil-ag controversy

By John Cox

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2012

County staff and local growers differ sharply over what Kern's Board of Supervisors should do at its meeting Tuesday to address a property access dispute between Shafter-area ag producers and oil and gas companies operating there.

Bakersfield lawyer George Martin, representing a local growers group, said the county ought to require oil companies to get a conditional use permit in cases where they are unable to reach an agreement with the owner of the surface property.

According to his Dec. 7 letter to the board, that could be accomplished in less than 120 days and cost less than \$5,000.

"By making these very simple changes to the land use law of the County of Kern, local control, also known as 'home rule,' is brought back to Kern County simply and swiftly," he wrote.

But county Planning Director Lorelei Oviatt, writing in a staff report to be considered at Tuesday's meeting, said a much more rigorous process is required that would call for a full environmental review.

That would take 18 months and cost up to \$5 million, she has said. Her report suggests that the bill be paid by whichever industry benefits from the change, be it oil or ag.

Oviatt's report called Martin's proposal "premature" and said it would "limit the range of possible solutions" to a series of undisclosed "larger issues" the oil industry wants to discuss with her office.

Oviatt, who did not respond to requests for comment Monday, has recommended that the board delay making a decision on the matter until its Jan. 22 meeting.

A local oil industry representative, Nick Ortiz with the Western States Petroleum Association, sided with Oviatt in stating that a resolution will take long and careful consideration.

"Based on the issues raised by Ms. Oviatt in her staff report, and the complexity of this issue, we agree that the board should continue this item and direct staff to engage both industries in ongoing stakeholder discussions," Ortiz wrote in an email Monday.

Over the last few years, the petroleum industry has butted heads with Shafter-area growers over access to orchards where oil and gas producers own underlying mineral rights.

While oil companies are trying to tap the area's huge and potentially very lucrative Monterey Shale formation, growers say the industry has swept aside its concerns about compensation and fair access to land. They further allege that high-pressure hydraulic fracturing by oil producers threatens to contaminate their water supplies.

The controversy came to a head at the Board of Supervisors' Nov. 13 meeting. That's when Martin told the board that the county should take back environmental review and permitting authority from a "corrupt" state oil agency that disregards growers' concerns.

Four county supervisors expressed support for the idea that the county should reassert control over oil projects in Kern farmland. They asked Oviatt to come back with suggestions as to how they could do that.

Oviatt's staff report warns that Martin's proposal would expose the county to costly litigation by oil companies unhappy about not receiving an operating permit from the county.

The debate could have statewide implications. The state has been sued at least three times over its approval of oil projects on Kern farmland. Each suit focused on the oil project's environmental review, or alleged lack of such a review.

State oil regulators have hinted that they are open to revising their environmental review process. That could involve handing over some permitting authority to counties including Kern, California's most productive oil county.

Kern oil exploration company fined

Central Valley Business News, Monday, Dec. 10, 2012

Vintage Production California LLC, a major oil and gas production company and subsidiary of OXY USA

Inc., has agreed to pay \$34,000 to resolve violations of the Clean Air Act related to greenhouse gas emissions at the Kern Front Oil Field located north of Bakersfield, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says.

The violations were identified and self-disclosed by Vintage and occurred in late 2011, when the company constructed three steam generators at the oil field without first obtaining a permit for greenhouse gas emissions under the "Prevention of Significant Deterioration" (PSD) permitting program.

Last month EPA granted authority to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue PSD permits to sources within its jurisdiction. Companies can now obtain all necessary air permits from the local air agency. Vintage will obtain the necessary PSD permit for the steam generators from the District, the EPA says.

While the PSD program has been in place for decades, permitting requirements for greenhouse gases became applicable in 2011.

"Companies need to be mindful of the relatively new permitting requirements," says Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's regional administrator for the Pacific Southwest. "Now that EPA has approved the Prevention of Significant Deterioration permit program for the San Joaquin Valley, it simplifies the process."

PSD is a preconstruction permitting program that applies to large stationary sources of air pollution. Before beginning construction of a project that is subject to PSD requirements, the owner or operator of the facility must obtain a permit that specifies how the facility will use best available control technology to reduce air emissions.

Worth noting: Vintage Production receives \$34,000 fine for unpermitted emissions; more

Excerpt from Bakersfield Californian article, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2012

A local subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum Corp. has agreed to pay \$34,000 to settle Clean Air Act violations relating to the release of greenhouse gases at three Bakersfield-area steam generators in late 2011.

The subsidiary, Vintage Production California LLC, identified and disclosed the violations on its own, according to a news release Monday from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA noted that Vintage built the generators at the Kern Front Oil Field without first getting the necessary Prevention of Significant Deterioration permit, which it noted can be obtained through the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The release said Vintage will obtain a PSD permit from the district.

A company spokeswoman declined to comment.