

How green the Valley Chamber program greatly expands

By Alex Breitler

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Even after seven years, there's no graying of the Green Team.

In fact, the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce's popular Green Team San Joaquin, which helps businesses become more environmentally friendly while also boosting their bottom lines, is now expanding to include the entire San Joaquin Valley.

"We're spreading the gospel," chamber program manager Frank Ferral told a crowd of businesspeople, government and school officials at a kickoff meeting Wednesday. "We're spreading the news about what we're doing here in Stockton, and you folks are taking the lead in making that happen."

Today, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will consider awarding the chamber \$20,000 to help fund the expansion. That money, combined with contributions from other sponsors, will help account for the \$85,000 that chamber officials say will be needed to replicate the Green Team in counties up and down the Valley.

The goal is to get 20 additional communities involved. The work has already started, really; green teams have sprouted recently in Stanislaus and Merced counties.

What exactly does the Green Team do?

Some of it is about networking and education. Since 2006, members of the Stockton team have gathered once a month at chamber headquarters, where they hear about the "green" products that local businesses are producing or the things they're doing to lessen their impact on the environment.

Businesses also can be certified "green" by allowing Green Team officials to assess their operations and suggest improvements.

The group also has pushed for policy changes, arguing that recyclable materials should not be sent overseas for processing when there is the potential to recycle them right here at home, creating local jobs.

Visits to other counties in recent years revealed interest in establishing a Valleywide program, Ferral said.

"We just want to continue all this momentum and build upon that," said Eddie Tolentino, general manager of The Newark Group, which runs a paper-recycling facility in Stockton and is involved in the Green Team. "It's a unique program, because it's bringing together private businesses with state, municipal and county government agencies, all for a common cause."

"Instead of competing or fighting against each other, we're all working together."