

Monday, April 29, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Turnout for Electric Vehicle Event Shocks Sponsors *CVTC, local electric co-ops offer chance for public to learn about EVs*

Eau Claire, WI – Interest in electric vehicles is on the rise in the Chippewa Valley, if the turnout at a special event featuring the technology held at Chippewa Valley Technical College’s Energy Education Center Saturday, April 27, is any indication.

“It exceeded our expectations,” said Adam Wehling, dean of agriculture, energy, and transportation at CVTC. “We were hoping for 75-100 people, and I think we can safely say we had around 200. And we had 18 electric cars here. We had a few arrive that we weren’t expecting, which was perfectly fine.”

CVTC co-sponsored the event with Eau Claire Energy Cooperative, Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative and Dunn Energy Cooperative.

Wehling noted that there is no doubt electric power as an alternative to gasoline engines is rising in popularity. CNN recently reported that in March electric vehicles outsold gasoline-powered vehicles for the first time in Norway, with 58 percent of the market.

“Here, half of new lawn and garden equipment sales are electric,” Wehling said.

“Our goal was to increase the awareness and feasibility of electric vehicles for the community,” said Monica Obrycki, chief administrative officer at ECEC. “We want our members to be able to use electric vehicles, but it’s a load management issue for us. In order to be financially beneficial to members and the co-op, we want to encourage off-peak charging. We have incentive programs to do that.”

But it was the frequency, rather than the time of day, of electric vehicle re-charging that concerned many visitors, according to Randy Kruger of Marshfield, who was frequently surrounded by people curious to see his fully electric Model X Tesla with its falcon-wing doors.

“A lot of people want to know about the range,” Kruger said, noting that the vehicle can go about 250 miles between charges. “What people don’t understand is how well-designed the car is to maximize range.”

Kruger demonstrated planning a trip to Dallas, Texas in the Tesla. The computer system maps out the route and indicates the location of stops for re-charging and the duration of each, which was typically under an hour.

"I have not been limited in my traveling, but I haven't driven cross country," Kruger said.

"Many of the electric vehicle systems are similar to gas vehicles, but where the electric vehicles differ is the motor and the battery," said Travis Gay, Automotive Technician program instructor at CVTC, who conducted break-out sessions on the technology. "The technology has come along to the point that ranges are increasing. It used to be about 100 miles; now it's over 200. That's the biggest concern to consumers."

Gay added that in the long run consumers could save on vehicle maintenance with fully electric vehicles, as they never need oil changes.

Environmental concerns draw some to the technology. "This is a thing of the future. We have to do it," said Millie Lenseling of Menomonie.

With over 95 programs offered both online and on-campus, Chippewa Valley Technical College delivers superior, progressive technical education which improves the lives of students, meets the workforce needs of the region, and strengthens the community. CVTC programs are designed with input of business and industry to prepare graduates for today's jobs, with 93 percent employed within six months of graduation and associate degree graduates earning an average annual salary of \$44,000.

Cutline:

Randy Kruger of Marshfield, right, talks with Millie Lenseling of Menomonie and Ken Schmitt of Chippewa Falls and his son, Tim, about Kruger's Tesla X Model fully electric vehicle at the Experience Electric Vehicles event at CVTC's Energy Education Center Saturday, April 27.

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