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Local businesses compete in earth-friendly challenge

The Commute Challenge offers Eugene businesses prizes for using alternative methods of transportation

By A. Sho Ikeda
Senior News Reporter

Some Eugene residents are strapping on their helmets and hopping on their bikes this week as Eugene businesses compete to get as many employees as possible to commute using alternative methods of transportation.

The fourth annual Commute Challenge is an event sponsored by the city of Eugene, Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce and Lane Regional Air Pollution Authority to encourage Eugene commuters to find other ways to get to work instead of driving alone. The event offers awards and prizes to businesses of all sizes for getting the highest number of employees to use alternative transportation to get to work during the week.

Commute Challenge coordinator Cindy Clarke said traffic congestion in Eugene is an "issue."

"Eugene has one of the worst traffic congestion (situations) for a city of its size," Clarke said, citing a new study conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute.

According to the study, the average rush-hour driver wasted 51 hours sitting in traffic in 2001. A driver in Portland, on the other hand, lost 58 hours a year in rush-hour traffic. Specific data for Eugene was not immediately available, however.

Clarke said the Commute Challenge was initiated to encourage Eugene businesses to look for different ways to get their employees to travel to work in order to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality and de-

crease parking demand.

"Biking and walking are obvious solutions that help the environment and are good for your health," Clarke said.

Clarke added that busses, carpools and vanpools are also viable transportation alternatives.

About 75 businesses are participating in this year's Commute Challenge, according to Clarke.

"That's pretty consistent from last year's event and for a community this size, is excellent," Clarke said.

Clarke said reducing traffic and improving air quality in Eugene would let the city avoid federal mandates requiring vehicle emission testing and other regulations.

AccuTel Inc. and Pentagon Federal Credit Union are just two of the businesses in this year's competition and have competed with each other since the first Commute Challenge. The two businesses are located next to each other.

Rosalind Kauffman, an employee development generalist for Pentagon Federal Credit Union, said the organization hoped to beat AccuTel in the friendly competition again this year after losing the first two years. She said the business is dedicated to assisting the community and the Commute Challenge is one way to help out.

"We like to do whatever we can to be a good neighbor to the community," Kauffman said.

Kauffman said the credit union employs about 190 people, including about 40 University students. She said the group organizes challenges between departments in order to encourage more employees to bike or carpool to work and offers raffle prizes and other awards.

"We already have 100 percent of one department biking or using the bus," said Kauffman.

Jessyca Dioszeghy, a supervisor at AccuTel, said her business lost against Pentagon Federal Credit Union last year but jokingly said that they had "let them win." She said she was confident AccuTel would win this year.

Dioszeghy said between 25 to 30 percent of AccuTel's 300 employees used alternative transportation on a regular basis to get to the inbound-call center's building on Country Club Road.

"We purchase bus passes for our employees and lots of people are using them," Dioszeghy said. She said limited parking motivated AccuTel to encourage employees to find other ways to get to work instead of driving.

Prizes for this year's event include rain gear for cyclists, gift certificates to local restaurants and a commuter bicycle provided by Wheelworks.

Wheelworks owner Bill Cole said the 7-speed Fuji Regis bicycle was a "really good bike" with a simple design and shock absorbers. Cole added that he was happy to be involved with the Commute Challenge.

"It's just a great way to get people to take a break from their regular routine and bike to work," Cole said. "You save money on fuel and improve your blood circulation and your health."

Categories for participating businesses range from small businesses with 1 to 24 employees to businesses with 300 or more workers. Today, coordinators for each business will report to the city the number of employees who participated in the Commute Challenge through the week. Winners from each category will be announced at a celebration at the Park Blocks on Thursday, October 9 at 5:15 p.m.

Contact the city/state politics reporter at shoikeda@dailymerald.com.

ELECTION

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Voters on Tuesday appeared unswayed by Davis' charge that the bizarre and historic recall process was the malevolent work of right-wing operatives bitter over his re-election last November. Nor were they moved by his repentant pledge to be a better listener and more passionate leader.

"The intensity of anger was too great for Davis to overcome," said Republican pollster Frank Luntz. "Once the recall made the ballot, he was toast."

Political analysts predict a rocky transition. Most elections allow several weeks for the new governor to move deliberately into office, replacing hundreds of key administrators with his own. In this case, the change would be sudden.

Basking in a clear victory, recall backers urged Shelley to certify the election quickly.

"The governor should pack his bags tonight and hand over power," said Rep. Darrell Issa, who bankrolled the recall petition drive.

Issa expressed glee at the result. "This is an overwhelming shift back to center and a rejection of the radical left."

Tuesday's vote marked the culmination of a mad pace for the leading campaigners in a race that lasted just 77 days and drew unheard of interest, amazement and derision from across the globe.

Financed largely by Issa, a car alarm magnate-turned Republican congressman, the campaign mustered 1.6 million signatures to qualify the recall. It survived numerous legal

challenges through state and federal courts to make it to Tuesday.

Schwarzenegger, with a thick wallet and a deep well of popularity, carried a message of hope for a Republican party that only last November was shut out of all statewide offices.

"Their hope for leadership, that's what he said he's bringing," Larry Gerston, a San Jose State political scientist, said. "He's the first one to say: 'I don't know statistics. I don't know data. I don't know programs. I'm a leader. It's a blind faith that whatever he's got, this guy will be better than the other guy.'"

Schwarzenegger has pledged to cap state spending, reform workers compensation, and rescind the recent tripling of the car tax without raising other taxes.

He has not specified how he will make up the \$4 billion in car tax revenues, nor how he plans to stanch another \$8 billion in projected red ink.

Instead, he has called for a 60-day fiscal audit and promised to expose billions of dollars in waste.

There have been 31 attempts to recall a California governor. Until now, none had succeeded. It was only the second successful recall of a governor in the nation's history, after North Dakotans yanked Gov. Lynn J. Frazier from office in 1921.

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