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Alt-fuel vehicles roadshow goes on in wake of new fee, credit cut

Event kicks off in Gainesville on June 15

By Jeff Gill
jgill@gainesvilletimes.com
@JeffGTimes

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ERIN O. SMITH/The Times
David Kim, a Buford resident, and Tim Echols, Georgia public service commissioner, charge their cars at the charging station outside Carriage Nissan in Gainesville before heading to Athens on Friday. Echols is holding the fifth annual Alternative Fuel Vehicle Roadshow, which will be kicking off in Gainesville on June 15.
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This year's statewide tour of environmentally friendly vehicles, starting with a June 15 stop in Gainesville, has a less-than-amicable cloud hanging over it.

Georgia's new transportation funding law, which takes effect July 1, calls for electric car owners to pay an annual $200 fee — $300 for those used for commercial purposes — and the $5,000 tax credit serving as an incentive to buy such a vehicle is gone.

"I think the average person probably has not heard about the additional $200 EV fee as much as the ending of the $5,000 state tax credit," said Public Service Commissioner Tim Echols, who leads the fifth annual Alternative Fuel Vehicles Roadshow set for eight stops June 15-26.

"My prediction is that the loss of the tax credit will cut sales by 75 percent."

Most legislators "who wanted to end the credit felt like it had done its job of jump-starting the EV market," said Echols, who personally leases three electric vehicles.

"If sales fall drastically and their theory proves to be incorrect, you may see the state tax credit return in a smaller form."

Still, Echols doesn't believe behind-the-scenes politics and the transportation law will faze interest in the roadshow, which "really focuses on the vehicles, not the roads."

"We want to help companies, municipalities and commuters evaluate the options of alternate fuel and make a wise decision."

The theme of this year's roadshow, which kicks off from 9 a.m. to noon June 15 at

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Gainesville stop

What: Alternative Fuel Vehicles Roadshow

When: 9 a.m. to noon June 15

Where: Brenau Downtown Center, 301 Main St., Gainesville

Admission: $29, general public; $15, students; free, private fleet, government staff and public officials. Registration is required at afvroadshow.com.

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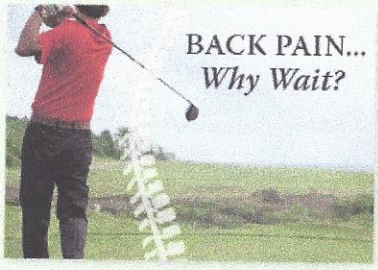
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the Brenau Downtown Center in Gainesville, is "Advancing the Choice for Clean Energy."

Electric, natural gas, propane, ethanol, and biodiesel fuels and vehicles will be on display at the event, which also features panel discussions on the benefits and challenges of switching to clean fuels.

"The Gainesville event is very well-attended by elected official and industry leaders," said Echols, an Athens resident, of stops in previous years.

The roadshow also travels to Cartersville, Albany, College Park, Decatur, St. Simons Island, Valdosta and Savannah.

"Helping ratepayers and businesses save money has been a hallmark of my tenure, and the roadshow provides great information for both," Echols said.

"Millennials are very interested in alternative fuel, and most of them aren't making enough money to really benefit from a tax credit yet," he said. "Having close to 20,000 electric vehicles on the road is generating a lot of interest."

Among those interested in such transportation are Dennis and Jocelyne Keijzer of Gainesville. They lease an electric 2014 Nissan Leaf.

"I was tired of the whole maintenance deal with my car and ... just driving an electric car is extremely cheap," Dennis Keijzer said.

"I still have a (gas-powered) car because we make long trips to Florida ... but we drive (the Leaf) to Atlanta and charge up there, go to the zoo and shopping," Jocelyne Keijzer said. "We love it."

For his part, Dennis Keijzer said he believes lawmakers acted prematurely in state law changes regarding electric vehicles.

"The market isn't there yet," he said. "You don't see that many Leafs out here in Gainesville. I wish there were more."

Echols said he "can appreciate the dilemma legislators were in as they tried to fund the transportation upgrades needed"

in Georgia.

"I would argue that any alternative fuel vehicle owner is paying a high price of inconvenience on a weekly basis — not to mention providing a benefit to our air quality ... in the metro area," Echols said.

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