

What's the buzz?

By Jim Biros
Photo by Tom Szalajka

Electric van keeps campus moving



The 2008 Columbia ParCar MEGA Van, a \$5,000 gift-in-kind donation from International Motorwerks of La Crosse, Wis., enables WITC-Rice Lake to become more efficient in its day-to-day operations and helps reduce its impact on the environment.

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– Craig Fowler, WITC-Rice Lake campus administrator.



It passes with barely a sound. Yet the Columbia ParCar MEGA Van is causing a buzz on Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College's Rice Lake campus. This completely electric vehicle has revolutionized day-to-day operations and helped the college lessen its footprint on the environment.

With a range of up to 50 miles between recharging and a top speed of 25 mph, the MEGA Van has enabled improved efficiency in completing many daily tasks around campus. Since the college has only had the MEGA Van in service for a few months, the total potential for the vehicle is still in the discovery stage.

“Our main foodservice kitchen is located on the neighboring University of Wisconsin-Barron County side of campus,” says Craig Fowler, vice president, Continuing Education; executive director, Foundation; and WITC-Rice Lake campus administrator. “However, about 80 percent of the meals they serve are at WITC.

“This means many times each day foodservice staff members load food and supplies in the campus passenger van or their own vehicles to transport across campus,” Fowler explains. “The electric van allows them to make those trips in a more efficient, more eco-friendly way. It also demonstrates that WITC is committed to making our environment better.”

The 2008 MEGA Van was a \$5,000 gift-in-kind donation from International Motorwerks of La Crosse, Wis. The gift was precipitated by a visit the president of International Motorwerks and ‘Hybrid Guru’ Chris Schneider made to WITC-Rice Lake and a meeting with WITC-Rice Lake’s conference center and foodservice manager Jack Haines.

“Jack had always expressed a keen interest in electric vehicle technology to us since our first visit to the Rice Lake campus,” Schneider says. “He put the Columbia ParCar MEGA Van on his wish list and budget for future campus food service operations, but because of budgetary constraints, he had to put this on the back burner.”

This spring, Haines had his wish granted.

“We finally purchased this van due to the generosity of International Motorwerks,” says Fowler. “Their donation was significant and allowed us to fund the rest of the purchase through our own budget. Without Motorwerks’ gift, this purchase would not have been possible.”

Since the MEGA Van is street legal, it’s also used for short trips throughout the city, which increases the overall usefulness of the vehicle.

Company president Schneider and his family have more than 50 years of experience in the automotive industry. Schneider is a University of Notre Dame graduate with a degree in mechanical engineering and an expert on hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles. He has toured the Midwest and appeared on Wisconsin Public Radio advocating the benefits of choosing transportation that will have the least impact on the environment and building a new American energy future.

“Motorwerks is a terrific organization and a great partner to work with on this project,” said Fowler. “They helped us all the way through from purchase and delivery to suggesting the van’s creative signage.” ■