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Metro, Ventura County, Shine 'Green' Spotlight on Pioneering Rideshare Programs of Southern California Employers

From the super-sized savings in commuters' pockets to a decrease in gasoline consumption and emissions reflected in recent public transportation ridership tallies, the concept of ridesharing is emerging from a disregarded option perceived as inconvenient into an acceptable, reliable and, yes, even hip, commute of choice.

So hip, in fact, that some 25 glittering Diamond Awards are handed out today in downtown Los Angeles to Southern California employers who are pushing the ridesharing envelope into the fast lane.

Hosted by Metro Commute Services and the Ventura County Transportation Commission at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, the 10th annual Rideshare Diamond Awards showcases the rideshare programs of employers whose unflinching stick-to-itiveness continues to chip away at traffic congestion by providing their employees with a full range of rideshare commuter options, services and programs.

Illuminating a stellar effort in unraveling the region's huge traffic knot, the Corporate Diamond Award was awarded to Raytheon's Space and Airborne Systems business, headquartered in El Segundo. Raytheon's pioneering effort evolved from a carpooling program to combat a parking shortage in the 1970s to a highly-effective and committed rideshare program of more than 2,000 participants.

The company donated land to the construction of a nearby Metro Green Line Station, co-founded the South Bay/Westside Transportation Management Agency and offered employees a variety of rideshare services, programs, donations, incentives and subsidies to encourage program participation, reduce fuel consumption, alleviate traffic congestion and improve air quality, said Raytheon Employee transportation coordinator Rose Bennett.

In an array of categories that demonstrate the many faceted approach needed to corral the region's errant traffic, 20 other programs are singled out for recognition.

Listed by category, the award winners include:

Metro's School Pool Program: La Crescenta Valley View Elementary School. Its "park it and walk it week" campaign was derived from a parent concerned about the impact of traffic tie-ups on student safety.

Metro Vanpool Program: General Motors and Federal Express pooled resources to keep vanpools up and running with flexible routes, fast commute times and low fares.

Metro Rewards: Gail Allen, ADP Automatic Data Processing, Inc. The program attracted more than a third of ADP employees to ridesharing using Metro Rewards incentives.

Ventura County Awards: Three awards for Highest Average Vehicle Ridership went to the City of Thousand Oaks Municipal Service Center followed by California Lutheran University and, for "Most Improved" to Bend-Pak Incorporated. Cherylanne Dooley, Cal State, Channel Islands, was named ETC of the Year. Patagonia, the environmental outfitters and outdoor clothiers, earned the Group Achievement award.

Outstanding Individual Achievement - Kreigh Hampel, City of Burbank. The recycling coordinator for the city of Burbank commutes by bike daily and encourages his fellow employees to do the same. At community events, Hampel runs a free hands-on bike tune-up workshop. Last year alone, he repaired more than 150 bikes and reached thousands of people with bicycling information.

Outstanding Employee Transportation Coordinator: Vera Tylecek, Los Angeles City College. Since she took over the rideshare program three years ago, Tylecek has doubled the number of transit riders and quadrupled her budget to \$20,000.

Outstanding Group Achievement: Eric Garcetti, Helen Leung, Michele Mowery, Melina Mariano and Francois Vern, City of Los Angeles. A range of city employees teamed up to increase facilities at the Los Angeles Civic Center for employees who bike to work.

Shoestring Program: Rosalind White, Los Angeles County Employees Retirement Association. Doing a lot with a little, White led efforts to form four vanpools last year for the association's 250 employees and expects to get several more on the road in 2008.

Innovative Rideshare Program: Sandy Paulin for Specialty Labs. The company, which offers subsidies and monthly celebrations, has 23 vanpools and 37 carpools on the road, after relocating the workforce to a new site, the rideshare programs helped the company retain employees faced with a longer commute.

Innovative Rideshare Strategy: Devon Deming, Los Angeles World Airports. The comprehensive rideshare program includes subsidized vanpools, free transit passes for employees and carpool rewards. In addition, special events and marketing activities keep ridesharing at the forefront of employees' minds. In 2007, the rideshare program at Los Angeles World Airports saved over 350,000 vehicle trips, 600,000 gallons of gas, saved employees \$1.7 million in fuel costs, and stopped more than 12 million pounds of greenhouse gas emissions, Deming reported.

Innovative Rideshare Program: Jean Ghianuly, Aerospace Corporation. In 1970, the aerospace corporation created the first corporate vanpool program west of the Mississippi. Vanpoolers also have access to an auto shop, car washes and even on-site fueling. Over the years, aerospace vanpools have made the equivalent of 144 trips to the moon – over 20 million miles.

Innovative Rideshare Program: Penny Menton, UCLA. A new seat-filler program called "+ One Better" allows participants to ride stand-by. The "+ One Better" program provides extra assurance that vanpools won't have empty seats.

Outstanding Marketing program: Dave Flores, Cal Poly Pomona. Outreach efforts put ridesharing center stage at sporting events and engaged students in contests – such as shooting free throws at basketball games halftime - while dispensing rideshare information.

Outstanding Marketing program: Luanna Huber, Walt Disney Company. Huber tied the summer rideshare promotion to the launch of the movie Ratatouille and sparked a 34 percent increase in rideshare enrollment. The rideshare department created a gourmet menu theme called 'savor the flavor of cleaner air' which included entrees of rideshare information and a "whine list" of excuses and solutions.

Honorable Mention: Judi Masuda for the City of Pasadena's vanpooling program; Ellie Knapp for the City of Burbank's "Buck-a-Bike" program; Mardy Rosal for Baxter Bio Science vanpool fleet; Cal State L.A. outreach commuter appreciation breakfast; Kathleen Chaney for Southern California Edison's vanpool program expansion; Terrie Castillo for Wesco Aircraft's vanpool program; and Luanna Huber for the Walt Disney Company's brainstorming cross-promotion of the launch of the ABC comedy series, "Carpooler." The cross-promotion drew attention to ridesharing and it also gave a boost to the show, which premiered in October 2007 with 9.3 million viewers but fell prey to the writer's strike six months later.

The Diamond Awards underscore the Texas Transportation Institute's 2007 Annual Urban Mobility Report, which noted that traffic congestion continues to plague American cities of all sizes, creating a \$78 billion annual drain on the U.S. economy in the form of 4.2 billion lost hours and 2.9 billion gallons of wasted fuel.

Citing 2005 statistics, the report noted the Los Angeles/Long Beach/Santa Ana area still leads in annual delays for travelers, amounting to 72 hours and 57 gallons of wasted fuel per traveler. That's 490.5 million wasted hours stuck in traffic, 384 million gallons of gas, and a congestion cost of \$9.3 billion in 2005.

By promoting public transportation options in the face of the daily traffic grind, Southern California employers are becoming part of the solution to the problem posed by solo drivers, said David Sutton, Director of Metro Commute Services.

Although some form of organized ridesharing has been around since the 1970s, the recent peak in alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle mode of transportation may signal a turning point in relieving traffic congestion

on the car-laden corridors of Southern California, he said.

Metro-085

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