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'Energetic' crowd revs up SolWest

■ Nonprofit event will move base in La Grande

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Posted: Tuesday, July 30, 2013 4:13 pm |

By Angel Carpenter Blue Mountain Eagle | 0 comments



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter

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JOHN DAY – The sun was blazing in good form for the 15th annual SolWest Fair.

A crowd of 1,100 from as far away as Israel and Spain, gave the July 26-28 send-off for the last SolWest event run by the local nonprofit EO Renew.

Renewable energy enthusiasts found a variety of workshops to choose from, including homemade solar ovens, solar hot water systems, reducing electric bills, living off the grid, and much more.

Vendors had everything from solar phone chargers, solar sprinklers and electric vehicles.

John Cogar said he was the first person in Lakeview to own an electric vehicle – now he sells them.

The electric utility vehicle he had on display, the exv2 Patriot from e-Ride Industries, he said, is ideal for municipalities, fairgrounds, hospitals, etc.

The low-speed, U.S.-made vehicle which costs around \$25,000 has a 40-50-mile range per charge, and the batteries regenerate while going downhill with the foot off the accelerator.

"It costs 50 cents for an overnight charge – same as using a hair dryer," Cogar said.

Members of the Oregon Electric Vehicle Association caravanned to the event in their OEV cars, including a Tesla, which can reach 0-60 mph in 4 seconds.

Keynote speaker Paul Scheckel of Vermont shared his knowledge on making homes more energy efficient.



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He later showed how to build a biogas digester used for space and water heating, lighting and cooking.

Children's activities included a handmade solar food warmer project and a juggling demonstration.

Surveying the SolWest visitors to find out what they love about the event was Karen Wagner, director of the La Grande-based Oregon Rural Action which is set to take over SolWest.

"We're hopeful we can get some excitement going," she said.

"SolWest fits well into our mission of sustainable community programs," she said. "We want more prosperous rural communities."

Organizer Jennifer Barker could be seen interviewing with a foreign TV camera crew, gleaning information from the event to take back home to Moldova.

Barker called the event a success.

She said she always wanted to live off the grid as a child.

"When I found out that solar could make that easy and pleasant, I got excited about solar," she said.

As SolWest now rides off into the sunset, Barker said there is joy looking forward and a lot of sadness looking back.

She plans to support SolWest in its new home as a volunteer, but she'll miss having a hand in the planning.

"It will be different, but it will reach a new audience," she said. "I hope it will be every bit as good."

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