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Published June 29, 2016

Cleaner Energy Option Coming to Lafayette

By Cathy Tyson

For the first time ever, energy choice is coming to Lafayette.

To announce the community choice energy program and educate residents, provider Marin Clean Energy is sending a series of five colorful mailers, in the form of post cards and letters, announcing the program over the summer. The first batch of 11,000 mailers went out to every electricity customer within the city of Lafayette during the week of June 20. The months-long outreach program is geared to give residents a complete picture of what greener power means, and how it works, prior to the September start date.

After thoroughly researching the issue, local lawmakers decided it was best to give residents a choice of where their energy comes from, and the opportunity to easily reduce their carbon footprint. MCE is a not-for-profit electricity provider that gives all PG&E customers the choice of having their power supplied from clean renewable sources like solar, wind, geothermal and hydroelectric. MCE partners with PG&E by generating the electricity, but PG&E continues to provide delivery and billing services. The utility still owns and reads their meters and is responsible for maintenance and repair services.

An MCE employee was working at the Lafayette city offices the week of the initial mailing, and city staff members have been trained about the program so they can answer questions for customers who come in to the city offices at 3675 Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Residents with questions can still visit the city offices, but they can also call or email provider MCE, or navigate the easy-to-use MCE website for more information.

"We want people to be informed, we don't want to upset anyone," said Jamie Tuckey, director of public affairs for MCE. People take energy for granted, they don't really think about the impacts on the environment, she said.

One of the biggest differences between MCE and PG&E is that MCE is a public agency - there are no shareholders and no dividends, so revenue is reinvested in projects, programs and rebates that are paid to customers who generate more energy than they use through rooftop solar panels. Electricity that MCE buys is fed onto the statewide shared electric grid and is delivered to homes and businesses.

Starting on a rolling basis in September, Lafayette customers will be automatically enrolled in MCE's Light Green 50 percent renewable energy service, but can upgrade to Deep Green 100 percent renewable energy or Local Sol - 100 percent locally produced solar energy. There will be an exit fee for leaving PG&E, however. It's also possible to opt out of MCE and use PG&E's standard power that has 30 percent renewable content.

According to Tuckey, a typical household would see less than a \$1 difference in their monthly bill for those that do nothing and simply roll into the light green energy option, in addition to the exit fee. For customers that choose Deep Green power, the difference in price would be about \$5 more per month.

The benefit of renewable non-polluting electricity from MCE is the elimination of over 122,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions to date, for a cleaner planet, MCE says. As MCE grows, it has committed over \$500 million to build wind, solar and waste-to-energy projects in California that also produce local jobs.

MCE was founded in 2008 and currently serves over 170,000 customers in Marin and Napa counties, along with Richmond, Benicia, El Cerrito, San Pablo. Lafayette will join Walnut Creek, Napa, American Canyon, Calistoga, St. Helena and Yountville, who are also starting service in September. It's a total of approximately 93,000 new customers.

In 2002 the energy market changed when state legislators approved the California Community Choice aggregation law, which transferred the default status of an investor-owned utility to a local CCA when available. MCE is California's first operating CCA program. The legislation mandated that customers living in a service area would automatically be enrolled, unless they opt out. For more

information, visit www.mceCleanEnergy.org/Lafayette.

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[back](#)

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