

Home builder aims to help spark electric car use

By Rose Simone

KITCHENER — David Brix hopes people plugging in their cars at home will become more commonplace than fuelling up at the gas stations.

The president of Guelph-based **Terra View Homes** is doing his part to pave the way toward that electric car future now.

This week, Terra View and **Sun Country Highway**, a Saskatoon-based company that sells electric vehicle chargers, got together to show off a model home in Kitchener that comes equipped with an electric vehicle charging station.

The electric chargers and various electric cars, ranging from a Tesla Model S to a Nissan Leaf, were also on display.

The model home on Tremaine Drive and five others will be sold with the electric chargers. Future homes will come with that option, Brix said.

"We are striving to be a leader in the industry and we are always trying to push the green envelope, so this is the next step."

Sun Country sells chargers for homes, and advanced units for apartment buildings, hotels and other businesses. It teamed up with home builders, hotels and other partners to build the electric vehicle charging infrastructure across Canada. It recently finished installing a network of charging stations along Highway 401.

But 80 to 90 per cent of charging is done at home and at workplaces, which is why Stephen Bieda, Ontario regional director for Sun Country, would like to see the wiring for electric charging stations become part of the Ontario home building code.

That will make it less costly for people buying houses to install electric chargers in the future, he said.

California and British Columbia have incorporated wiring for electric vehicle charging stations into their building codes and Bieda is hoping the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Housing and Public Affairs will do the same in this province.

"We are trying to raise the awareness," Bieda said.

The Ontario government is already progressive in offering rebates for buying electric cars as well as for installing green features in homes, including the cost of chargers and the installation, Bieda said. But if wiring is routine when houses are built, it would be cheaper for homeowners and could save the government money, he said.

"Typically, the average cost to install a charger is around \$1,070, but if you pre-wire, you can reduce that to around \$300," Bieda said.

The electric car future is coming, Bieda said. The goal is to have one in 20 vehicles, five per cent, be electric by the year 2020.

"After the rebates you can buy an electric vehicle for as little as \$18,000. So it can actually be very affordable," he said.

But what really draws consumers is low operating costs. With a gas-powered car, you might spend \$2,000 to \$5,000 a year on gas. With an electric vehicle, you can charge up your car for about \$600 a year, Bieda said. Over 10 years, you could save more than \$14,000 by driving an electric car, he said.

Batteries for electric cars also are improving. The Tesla Model S, for example, can take you 480 kilometres, about the distance from this area to Ottawa on a full charge, Bieda said.

In the United States, sales of electric vehicles have grown 440 per cent in the past year, he said. With increasing use, the price of going electric will likely come down even further, he added.

"The manufacturers that are putting billions into the research and development are also putting mega dollars into education, marketing, advertising, and communicating the benefits to the consumer," he said.

The smog that cars contribute to is a huge cost, Bieda said. Earlier this month, the city of Harbin, China, with a population of 10 million, was paralyzed by smog, with schools and roads shut down and planes grounded as visibility was reduced to 10 metres in places.

"As people become part of the industrialized world, we need options," Bieda said.

Brix of Terra View Homes said he believes electric cars will become a normal part of our lives and it makes sense for people going into new homes to add the wiring.

"It will make an electric car that much more affordable," he said.



Electric charger

Phil Walker, Record staff

David Brix (left), president of Terra View Homes, and Steve Bieda of Sun Country Highway plug an electrical charger into a vehicle at a Terra View model home on Tremaine Drive in Kitchener.