



# WSTA gets more hybrid buses

BY TODD LUCK  
THE CHRONICLE

With the addition of more new hybrid vehicles, 75 percent of the Winston-Salem Transit Authority's fleet is hybrids, giving it one of the highest percentages for alternatively-fueled fleets in the country.

WSTA Director Art Barnes said he's proud of the Transit Authority's devotion to vehicles that pollute less and conserve fuel.

"We made a conscious decision to have a fleet that would address environmental concerns," said Barnes.

WSTA is adding 12 new hybrid buses and six smaller buses for Trans-Aid. This represents an \$8.8 million investment in

the WSTA. Federal funds cover 85 percent of the cost, with state and city money covering the rest.

WSTA began transitioning to hybrids in 2010 and has been using Gillig hybrid electric buses. This year's new buses are New Flyers. WSTA Director Art Barnes said the WSTA went with another manufacturer because New Flyer could deliver the buses within nine months while Gillig was going to take at least 18 months. He said the quicker turnaround meant the buses would be in use before the WSTA makes its transition to the new routes that begin next



Barnes

year.

Barnes said hybrids, which use battery power for lower speeds and diesel fuel for higher speeds, have served WSTA well. The older model buses get 3.5 miles to the gallon while the hybrids get 5-6 miles per gallon. This equaled a \$400,000 savings on gas in 2010. They also save on maintenance, especially on brakes. He said there are no immediate plans to get more hybrids, but moving to all hybrid buses remains a long-term goal.

The New Flyers are largely the same as the Gillig buses. They're the same size and seating capacity. The New Flyers do have rear doors that are four

inches wider, which will make it easier for passengers to exit. They also have fold-out wheel chair ramps, which should be faster and more efficient than the wheelchair lifts found on other buses.

Barnes said he's been impressed with the New Flyers that have been used for the last couple weeks and expects the rest to begin serving passengers soon.

"They've worked out well," said Barnes. "They've proven to be quite dependable."

The buses, which cost \$600,000 each, are a long-term investment. Buses have a lifespan of 13 years before a transit authority qualifies for federal funds to replace them.

# Fairgrounds improvements continue



Photos by Todd Luck

The Winston-Salem Fairgrounds Annex, which is currently hosting a consignment sale, has a new roof that fixes problems it had with leaks.

## A new marketing person will be hired this year for non-fair events

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The Winston-Salem Fairgrounds is continuing its plans for improvements with a new marketing position and up to \$2 million in capital improvements this fiscal year.

The fairgrounds are owned by the city but are fiscally self-sustaining, generating enough revenue to cover its own expenses and debt revenue. This includes the new marketing position and borrowing money for the capital improvements. The fairgrounds' profitability is due in large part to the highly successful Dixie Classic Fair, which is the second largest agricultural fair in the state.

The new position and improvements are aimed at making the facilities at the fairgrounds more attractive to the many events it hosts year round. The marketing position, which will cost \$53,000 including benefits, will be responsible for sell-

ing sponsorships and attracting new customers to rent the venues. Robert Mulhearn, fairgrounds facilities and venues manager, said he expects the new marketing person will be in place before this year's Dixie Classic Fair in October.

Mulhearn said there have been many improvements made already in the last year. The Annex's roof has been replaced, along with its chiller system for the ice rink it hosts from October through March. Painting was also done to improve its appearance. Mulhearn said there



Mulhearn

should be no more problems with leaks from the roof of the Annex.

"The Annex is good shape," he said.

Bolton Home and Garden Building now has improved walls and ceiling, which should be finished this week. The newly painted walls and a drop ceiling provides much better lighting and improve the appearance of the smaller event venue, which

Mulhearn hopes will attract more meetings and events.

The Midway, which was visibly cracked and worn, has now been repaved. Mulhearn said the improvement helped attract USA Cycling to hold a national cycling race on it in May. Additionally, the cattle barn, which is used for the fair and cattle shows, now has a new cement floor.

Improvements to be done this fiscal year, which began July 1, include more work on the Annex. Currently there are problems with the heating and air system that cause maintenance workers to climb into the ducts to manually reset the units daily when there's an event. Plans are to replace the heating and air systems, put in LED lighting, and make improvements to the floor.

"It'll be a really neat building by the end of the year," Mulhearn said.

There are also plans to replace the lighting along with the heating and air system in the Education Building. The Grandstand will be repainted and there'll be a fairground-wide camera system installed both inside and outside of its buildings. There's additional improvements planned for

the Bolton Building and the Farmer's Market, which have yet to be determined.

Even with the improve-

ments, there are no rate increases for renting fairgrounds' facilities. A fee charged for labor, such as cleaning or ticket taking,

has gone up due to the city's increase in minimum wage for city employees.



Bolton Home and Garden Building at the Winston-Salem Fairgrounds is getting a new ceiling to go with its newly painted walls.