

## **AVCE meeting draws full house**

Town reveals it has a 5-year contract with Shell, and has already met state renewable mandate

**By Steve Hunt**

Editor

APPLE VALLEY — Beginning April 1, town residents will have a simple choice when it comes to electricity, Apple Valley Public Services Manager Joseph Moon told a large crowd on Tuesday afternoon: Save money or don't. A near-capacity crowd estimated at 300 people turned out at the Apple Valley Conference Center for one of two informational meetings on the town's Choice Energy program. A second meeting was held Tuesday night.

"The ultimate goal is to provide a choice for citizens of Apple Valley and save money," Moon said. "You can do that or not.

"Before this, how many choices did you have for energy? You had one choice (Southern California Edison). Now you do have a choice."

Unless residents opt-out of the Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) program, the town will become Apple Valley's default energy provider on April 1. All that means is the town has the opportunity to buy energy on the open market and sell it to its residents at a lower rate than Southern California Edison now offers.

Moon said Apple Valley has signed a five-year contract with Shell Energy North America, a subsidiary of Shell Oil, thus locking in a stable electricity rate for its residents for those five years.

That's why the town will be able to offer a 3 percent savings to residents on the cost of that electricity, Moon said. He said Southern California Edison will continue to transmit the energy, send out residents' electricity bills and handle any issues that may arise, such as downed power poles or outages. The 3 percent savings won't apply to a resident's total monthly bill, just that portion of the bill that pertains to energy use. (For example, SCE bills for energy transmission separate of use.) Though this program is new to the Victor Valley, it's not new to the state. The city of Lancaster has been involved in the CCA program, as well as several Northern California cities.

"There are one million customers in California under the CCA umbrella," Moon said. "Most of them are up north. This will be commonplace in the next year or two. We are at the forefront.

"I started looking at CCAs in 2010. But in 2010 it was not feasible. It would have cost too much for citizens. Finally, in late 2015, early 2016 it became feasible, because the cost of energy had gone down."

"Lancaster has had it a couple years now and it's been very beneficial," Town Manager Frank Robinson said. "They started out just providing to commercial customers, then opened it up to residential.

"Now we're getting calls from other communities, not just here in the Valley but also down the hill."

Robinson said he thought having a CCA could help Apple Valley attract businesses, especially those whose energy use is substantial, as 3 percent savings could be a significant amount of money.

The great thing for the town is it doesn't take on the cost of generation or transmission, both Moon and Robinson said, all it has to do is buy the energy, which residents ultimately pay for.

Although Moon said the General Fund will loan the program \$2.5 million for startup costs — which he said would be repaid with interest — Southern California Edison will continue to deliver the electricity to residents' homes or to businesses.

After Moon's presentation, he and one of the town's consultants spent more than an hour answering residents' questions. Some of the questions were fairly straightforward, while others were speculative, wild or both. Moon said many had no basis in fact or reality.

Opting out is pretty simple. If you don't want to save money, you don't have to, Moon said. Just let the town know. There will be an opportunity to opt back in, however, you can't bounce in and out of the program at will.

There are no fees to either opt out or opt back in, Moon said.

Through its contracts, the town already is guaranteed to meet the state mandate of 33 percent energy from renewable sources by 2020, Moon said. He said the town will get more than 35 percent of its energy from renewable sources. If residents want to support the environment and ensure 50 percent use of renewable energy, Moon said they can opt to do so by paying \$2 more per month.

