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Hydrogen fueling station unveiled

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In 2005, a group of Humboldt State University students entered the national Hydrogen Student Design Contest with their design of a hydrogen fueling

station for hydrogen-powered vehicles.

Not only did the HSU students win the contest, they got to see their project come to life Thursday with the unveiling of the station on Humboldt State University's campus.

On Thursday morning, HSU President Rollin Richmond, U.S. Rep. Mike Thompson, Charlie Fielder of Caltrans, and Peter Lehman of the Schatz Energy Research Center, as well as the students themselves, cut the ribbon to the station and powered the hydrogen-fueled Toyota Prius the university owns.

Juliette Bohn, one of the students who proposed the design, was there and said she felt elated to see her design as a functioning station.

"This is a really remarkable moment, and I'm happy to see things moving in a forward process towards clean renewable energy and see our society moving in that direction," she said.

Humboldt State is the first university in the country to have a hydrogen fueling station, and the Prius — which Richmond and a handful of others have access to — is the first in Humboldt County, "hopefully the first of many," Lehman said.

Thompson addressed the excited crowd about the station and how it represents positive change for the future.

"It's not just the time, it's past time we started making serious changes in the way we get around," he said. "Today we're at ground zero, where the water hits the wheel, and put into practice what others have only talked about."

Ten years ago, the first hydrogen fueling station was built in Southern California.

The one that opened Thursday is the now the 27th in the state and 70th in the country.

Fielder described how Caltrans funded the project's assembly, engineering and testing. "The purpose is to demonstrate and educate that hydrogen-powered vehicles are available and possible in Humboldt County," adding that it would lead Humboldt County in a direction that is less dependent on fossil fuels.

Anyone with a hydrogen-powered vehicle can use the fueling station, and it can power up to four vehicles a day.

Lehman said, "We believe in a renewable energy future ... let's be renewable energy pioneers." He added that he "believes in a Humboldt County that left fossil fuels in the rearview mirror."

And with that, Thompson fueled the Prius, and took a short ride through the Harry Griffith Hall parking lot.

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