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For immediate release
Contact: Sheila Storm (520) 792-1093 or (520) 405-1181
Colleen Crowninshield (520) 792-1093 or (520) 440-0949

Tucson Clean Cities to host urban high school students, driving self-built, all-electric vehicle from San Diego to Florida

What do you get when you mix a group of urban high school students with education and an environmental concern? Answer: An all-electric plug-in vehicle that reaches a 300- to 440-mile distance per gallon equivalent.

A group of MINDRIVE students from Kansas City, Mo., will roll into Tucson today with a 1977 Lotus Esprit in their “Electrifying Education Coast-to-Coast” journey from San Diego to Jacksonville, Fla., a 2,500-mile journey they anticipate completing in a two-week period.

MINDRIVE is an educational program that uses experiential methods to teach at-risk urban high school teens through hands-on work in its automotive design and contemporary communication classes. The automotive class builds prototype ultra, high-efficiency alternative fuel plug-in electric vehicles.

“The mission of MINDRIVE is to inspire at-risk teens to want to learn, expand their vision of their futures, and to have a positive influence on urban workforce development,” said MINDRIVE CEO Steve Rees.

Their stopover in Tucson will be hosted by Tucson Clean Cities at Firestone Complete Auto Care, 290 W. Wetmore, on the grounds of the Tucson Mall from 4 to 6 p.m.

“We invite anyone interested in electric vehicle technology to stop by and see

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what level of accomplishment the students from Kansas City have achieved,” said Colleen Crowninshield, manager of Tucson Clean Cities, a program of Pima Association of Governments. “As electric vehicle technology evolves, it is inspiring to see the innovation and vision that can be generated in our nation by our youth to help us reduce our dependence on foreign oil.”

The MINDDRIVE group is expected to arrive in Tucson at 4 p.m. and will have the Lotus on display at Firestone until approximately 6 p.m. The students and other MINDDRIVE mentors will be available to answer questions about the vehicle and how they were involved in developing it.

MINDDRIVE, www.minddrive.org, has been featured or recognized by CNN cable news, Yahoo, Car Talk, Auto Week and Motor Week. Their first vehicle, Project Lola, built in August 2010 using Bridgestone Ecopia tires, also was on display at the 2010 and 2011 Indy 500 in the Bridgestone-Firestone display garage.

Car details for the cross-country trip:

- The body: a 1977 Lotus
- Power Plant: a 7-inch direct current motor, generating approximately 12 hp
- Batteries: 30, 3.2 volt, 180 amp-hour lithium ion batteries wired in series to produce 96 total volts
- Tires: Bridgestone Ecopia EP422
- Charging: the car will be charged in approximately one hour by a stand-alone 220 volt/30 amp generators.

Pima Association of Governments is an association of local, state and tribal governments with a mission to build consensus among its members and the public on regional planning for transportation, air quality and water quality. For more information visit www.PAGregion.com or www.facebook.com/PAGRegion

Clean Cities is a voluntary program of the U.S. Department of Energy to expand the use of alternatives to gasoline and diesel fuel, accelerate the use of alternative fuel vehicles and build a local refueling infrastructure for these vehicles.