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ABOUT MIKE ARMSTRONG



Mike Armstrong, a business editor and writer for nearly two decades, is the Inquirer's business columnist and PhillyInc blog editor.

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AFS Trinity shows off its hybrid electric vehicle to Delaware officials

Maybe tiny Delaware really can make a comeback in the auto-assembly industry, thanks to technology and tax dollars.

A Bellevue, Wash., company that has developed hybrid electric vehicle technology was in Dover, Del., giving rides in its prototypes to state officials, including **Gov. Jack Markell**.

AFS Trinity Power Corp. calls its vehicle, which is a reconfigured Saturn VUE SUV, the XH150. It first showed off the prototypes at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit in January 2008 and brought them to Philadelphia that April.

AFS Trinity CEO **Edward W. Furia**, a Philadelphia native, said the company made the trip east to meet with Markell on the suggestion of attorney **Stephen M. Goodman**, a partner in the Philadelphia office of **Morgan Lewis & Bockius**.

In the last two years, Delaware lost two huge auto-assembly factories when **Chrysler** and **General Motors** closed them. But last fall, the California-based **Fisker Automotive** announced plans to build its electric cars at GM's shuttered Wilmington plant. And as PhillyDeals reported last week, **AutoPort Inc.** was picked by the **U.S. Postal Service** to build prototype electric vehicles in Wilmington.

Furia said he views Delaware's idled factories and able workforce as a viable option to produce AFS Trinity's hybrid, which has an all-electric range of 40 miles on a single charge. But the privately held company is not close to picking a location.

While Markell was test-driving AFS Trinity's XH150, GM said it would invest about \$246 million in its Baltimore Transmission factory to build electric motors, creating 200 jobs in Maryland. GM was able to do so, in part, with funding from the **U.S. Energy Department**.

AFS Trinity didn't apply for any of the billions offered by the Energy Department in 2009, Furia said, because "the regulations were not friendly to small business." I've heard other alternative-energy entrepreneurs make the same complaint.

To be chasing his electric car dream after 20 years, Furia had convince lots of people to take a chance of him. Furia said **John Andrews "Jay" Harris IV**, of Berwyn, who died Dec. 29, had supplied critical funding that enabled him to build the prototypes that spent Tuesday tooling around Dover.

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