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Car-sharing club to launch in Syracuse

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By Tim Knauss
Staff writer

Two Syracuse business partners have launched a car-sharing organization with plans to put at least 10 cars on city streets by late fall for people to rent by the hour.

CuseCar, a nonprofit corporation, was formed to give people the convenience of using a vehicle occasionally without the cost of owning it, said founders Vita DeMarchi and Eckhardt C. "Chris" Beck.

Similar car-sharing operations have popped up in at least 20 American cities, including Ithaca, fueled by environmental concerns and increasing worries about the cost of gas.

Ithaca's experience has been encouraging. After starting up with 50 members just two months ago, the nonprofit Ithaca Carshare now has more than 200 members and is likely to add to its fleet of seven vehicles soon, said Jennifer Dotson, executive director.

"It's been really quite successful," Dotson said.

Car sharing is designed to complement public transportation and urban lifestyles by giving residents easy access to a vehicle when they need one. The overall effect is to reduce dependence on automobiles, thus lowering air emissions, fuel consumption, urban sprawl and wear and tear on roads, DeMarchi said.

The concept fits well with Syracuse's effort to brand itself as a home for green business, she said.

"Syracuse is the Emerald City. It's the green city. CuseCar has to work here," DeMarchi said.

CuseCar has not established its rates yet. Ithaca Carshare's rates are \$7.95 an hour and 20 cents a mile with a \$50 annual membership, or \$4.95 an hour and 20 cents a mile with a \$200

membership. The rates include gas.

Here's how car sharing works: Members pay an annual fee and receive an identification card or fob. After reserving a car online or by phone, they use the identification card to access the car. There is no paperwork to fill out.

CuseCar likely will park its cars at various locations in central Syracuse, Beck said. DeMarchi and Beck are working with an advisory committee to identify locations. The committee includes representatives from the Syracuse Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems, the Metropolitan Development Association, the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council and other organizations.

CuseCar also wants to hear from people who are interested in using the service. The organization plans to launch a Web site later this week at www.cusecar.com, where potential users can express interest or voice opinions. Interested residents also can call 475-3700, ext. 34, for more information.

DeMarchi and Beck are managing partners of Synapse Partners LLC and two associated companies headquartered in Syracuse. The companies provide risk management, insurance and property management services for environmental and renewable energy businesses and projects.

With a third founding member, Utica lawyer Richard Pertz, Beck and DeMarchi started CuseCar to benefit the community, they said. They hope to secure government funding for the organization but are committed to launching CuseCar with or without it, DeMarchi said.

"Chris and I decided to just make it happen," she said.

They plan to hire an executive director and establish an office for the organization soon, Beck said.

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