

By Tom Stallard and Don Saylor

A new year offers a clean slate — a chance to celebrate achievements, assess the challenges of the past and start the new year with fresh energy.

Our biggest achievement in 2018 was the launch of Valley Clean Energy (VCE), our local public electricity program. With years of planning and lots of community support, we officially started serving the cities of Woodland and Davis and unincorporated Yolo County last June. Over the last 6 months VCE has been providing greener energy, customer choice, local control and reinvestment in the community.

VCE's standard portfolio of electricity includes 42 percent renewable energy, compared to 33 percent provided by PG&E. This allows VCE customers to help our region and our state take a big step toward changing our fossil fuel-based economy.

Another notable achievement in 2018 was the VCE partnership with Davis, Woodland and Yolo County to apply for a \$2.9 million grant from the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), which we ultimately received. The grant will provide dozens of new, publicly available electric vehicle chargers and lay the foundation for electric vehicle charging and lower carbon transportation options in the region.

Although 2018 was a banner year for the effort to bring local energy control to Yolo County, we also faced significant headwinds from State regulators. Due to decisions by the California Public Utilities Commission that favored investor owned utilities like PG&E, and requirements from the California Energy Commission, VCE took a \$4.7 million hit to our young program's budget, leaving us with many difficult choices — one of which was the decision to delay the enrollment of existing solar customers.

Since both of us are solar customers, we were disappointed that we could not sign up right away for the local energy program we help run. But as board members we understand that this delay is simply a bump in the road on a long journey toward completely renewable, more affordable electricity. We also understand why some folks may be unhappy about the delay of enrolling solar customers, but the VCE board's difficult decision was made with the long-term good of the program in mind.

Despite these challenges we are reminded that our communities launched Valley Clean Energy last summer to bring cleaner energy at competitive rates to local residents and businesses while reinvesting earnings into our economy by creating local green energy programs and projects.

We have been successful in taking the important first steps toward these goals because VCE is accountable to the communities it serves, not to shareholders. VCE offers choice, local governance and transparency — everything local energy customers have sought for years.

One of the tangible, immediate impacts of our local energy program is the fact that VCE customers are reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by automatically receiving a higher percentage of renewable electricity than that provided by PG&E, and they can up the ante by choosing that 100% of their power come from renewables for a small premium. We are proud that VCE customers are each doing their small part to help California avoid the growing consequences of climate change like the tragic wildfires of 2017 and 2018 that devastated our sister communities in northern California.

VCE's customers are joined in these efforts by the 18 other CCE programs which are already serving more than 8 million customers in more than 160 communities across California. Dozens more communities are recognizing the benefits of taking local control of their energy futures and are lining up to form or join CCE programs. We encourage and welcome them to this energy renaissance that is challenging the old ideas that clearly no longer serve the best interests of our communities.

With Valley Clean Energy, we've taken a big step toward a more sustainable future. As solar customers ourselves, we're willing to wait another year to join the program, knowing we're already doing our part for renewable energy.

Because VCE is in the business of delivering value to the customers and communities we serve instead of shareholders and Wall Street, we have the advantage of being able to take the long view. As we reflect on 2018 we are reminded that the success of our community choice energy program is our higher priority because it is poised to deliver decades of value to our communities.

—Tom Stallard is a Woodland City Council member and board chair of Valley Clean Energy. Don Saylor is a Yolo County supervisor and a member of the VCE board. To learn more about Valley Clean Energy, visit www.valleycleanenergy.org or email customerservice@valleycleanenergy.org.

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