

New green Sun Toyota is dedicated to energy efficiency

BY LISA BUIE, Times Staff Writer

Sun Toyota boasts a host of energy-saving features including energy-efficient lighting to become a LEED-certified dealer.

HOLIDAY - When it came time to build a new Sun Toyota dealership, general manager Joe Reth drew his inspiration from an unusual source.

"Publix," he said. "Even if you buy a six-pack and you're a man, they offer to carry it out for you." He noticed the Hawkins Construction trucks parked outside new Publix supermarkets. "Publix never does anything wrong twice," he said.

So it came to be that the Tarpon Springs contractor got a hand in helping to build a dealership that more than doubles the space and offers cutting-edge green features such as solar panels to power energy-efficient lighting, recycled concrete walls and floors, computers to sign sales paperwork, and an oil change bay that recycles oil and sells it back to recycling firms, and rain barrels to provide irrigation.

"Feel this glass," Reth said, pressing his palm up to the glass walls of the building constructed to withstand 140 mph winds. "You won't feel any heat coming in from that glass."

The dealership, at U.S. 19 and Gulf Trace Boulevard, will replace the 38-year-old building a few blocks away where U.S. 19 intersects with State Road 54. Sun will sell used cars there, while another building in Holiday will be closed and leased. The new dealership was set to open this month, but wet weather delayed the finishing touches.

Now executives hope to get it open by Labor Day, with a grand opening in October. Executives have added 35 jobs already and hope to add 35 more within three months, bringing the total work force to more than 230.

During a tour Thursday, Reth showed off the building, which reflects the Japanese parent company's emphasis on energy efficiency in its facilities as well as in vehicles such as the gas-sipping Prius. It is certified to standards set by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, an internationally recognized program set up by the U.S. Green Building Council. Sun will join eight Toyota and Lexus facilities that are certified as green, according to the parent company's website.

"It's the right thing to do," Reth said as he showed off offices equipped with DocuPay, a system where customers sign sales papers electronically. They are then e-mailed to customers.

"We never have to print anything," Reth said.

Green has been a trend in the auto industry, according to websites such as autotropolis.com. In addition to Toyota, General Motors has been adopting environmentally friendly features such as geothermal pumps and biodiesel-powered machinery as well as water soluble paint booths. Toyota's goal is to have 100 LEED certified dealers.



Sun Toyota general manager Joe Reth stands in the breeze atop the new dealership in the final states of completion. Reth is surrounded by rooftop solar panels that power the building's lights.

Despite the devastating March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan that resulted in a shortage of cars and parts, the Holiday location is doing fine because most of the cars are manufactured in the United States, unlike some competitors. Timing was also in Sun Toyota's favor, as new facilities get sent extra merchandise.

"The biggest problem we had was paint pigment issues," he said. Thus, colors now are a bit limited, though that soon will change.

"You see a lot of silvers out there now, a lot of blues," he said. All the savings, which cuts energy bills by two-thirds, means more comfort for the mechanics, who get to work in air-conditioned comfort.

"It's permanently set to 78 degrees," Reth said.

