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Azure's commercial hybrid in high demand across country

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OAK PARK - Azure Dynamics Corp. of Oak Park, in a step toward building its own nationwide dealer network, has signed a sales and service agreement with Palmetto Truck Center in Miami.

The agreement allows Palmetto to serve growing market demand for Azure's new fuel-efficient, low-maintenance and environmentally-friendly Balance Hybrid Electric E450 commercial vehicle.

"We sought a dealership partner that has proven excellence in the commercial truck market," said Jay Sandler, Azure's vice president of sales. "Palmetto immediately understood the significant value proposition of the Azure Balance Hybrid Electric vehicle. Together, we are eager to take our product to market in South Florida and beyond."

Sandler said Azure Dynamics plans to sign about 50 dealers in the next year in major metropolitan markets in the United States and Canada.

The company has already identified the initial 33 target markets.

Prior to developing the relationship with Palmetto, Azure had been selling direct to market. However, expected demand and recently announced orders from major fleet owners like AT&T Corp. and FedEx have encouraged Azure to broaden its distribution network by partnering with commercial vehicle specialists, Sandler said.

The Balance Hybrid Electric is integrated on Ford's E450 Cutaway.

The hybrid powertrain features electric-launch assist, engine-off at idle and regenerative braking, improving the vehicle's fuel economy by up to 40 percent, reducing maintenance cost by up to 30 percent and minimizing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has placed an order for ten of Azure's hybrid buses. The gas-electric hybrids seat 18 passengers each and will take delivery of the vehicles this year.

PennDOT also has an option to purchase an additional 15 buses.

The first ten buses will operate in York County, Pa., and will be used to augment PennDOT's "ride-share" program.

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