

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

OU energy manager helps start biodiesel facility

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

Many people who have long commutes are feeling the pinch from rising gas prices. For OU Energy Manager Jim Liedel, the gas prices for his 50-mile commute aren't an issue. That's because Liedel's Volkswagen Passat runs on biodiesel. Using discarded oil from restaurants, Leidel can "home brew" his own fuel. Now, working with a local greenhouse, Leidel is assisting in starting a small biodiesel manufacturing facility where others can learn more about the process and the use of the fuel.

Biodiesel is a clean burning, renewable fuel made from vegetable oil that comes from new soy bean oil or the grease restaurants discard. Biodiesel can be a blend of biodiesel and traditional diesel, or it can be used straight. Bio-fuels can also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions that can contribute to global warming.

Through a student in one of his classes, Leidel was introduced to Tim Travis, owner of Goldner Walsh Garden and Home in Pontiac. Travis was interested in developing a biodiesel facility to produce fuel for his landscaping trucks. Leidel has the technical know-how and decided to team up with Travis to work on the facility.

"We wanted to do something right that is forward-thinking. Green is a feature of our business. We want to provide access to some green technology so the public can see it in action. Many times, these types of facilities aren't accessible to the public," Travis said.

Leidel and Travis are turning a portion of the greenhouses' building into a biodiesel manufacturing area. On the roof, they hope to have solar panels, which will help with the power and heat of the facility. In addition, there are plans for a rain garden and bio-remediation process.

The partnership between Leidel and Travis is linking the academic community to the environmental community.

"I want to bring academics and the classroom to what I do. We aren't going to succeed in going greener if we don't bring the two together," Travis said.

Work on the facility has just begun. Travis and Leidel are still looking for people to support the organization. Plumbers, electricians and other trades will help bring the facility together.

Leidel said any diesel car or truck could run on biodiesel. He said some older ones may have rubber hoses and belts, which may clog at first, but will eventually work fine.

Currently there is no biodiesel distributor in Oakland County.

Leidel used a mixture of oil and methanol to create the fuel for his car. He said the process is a fairly easy one.

"The hardest part is getting the oil and getting clean oil," Leidel said. He said the best oil to use is canola oil and it can't have any grill scrapings in it. The soy, peanut and other oils burn slightly differently in the cars."

Currently, Leidel is getting approximately 40-42 miles per gallon in his biodiesel Passat.

For more information on Leidel's alternative fuel projects, visit the **OU Energy** Web site.

SUMMARY

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