

West Valley companies cook up responsible biofuel

By **Rebekah L. Sanders** - Sept. 11, 2009 08:55 AM
The Arizona Republic
Glendale Edition

Valley [restaurants](#) are turning to a new Glendale company that collects used cooking oil to convert into cleaner-burning motor fuel.

Green Dining Network aims to build up a following not only in the West Valley but eventually across the state.

"People think if you go green it's more expensive," company President Marv McCarthy said. "We believe you can be environmentally responsible and economically profitable at the same time." The firm, which recently relocated from Gilbert, picks up [vegetable oil](#) that restaurants normally throw away after frying up potato chips, French fries and other foods.

Workers then empty hundreds of gallons of the used oil from delivery trucks into tanks at the industrial facility just south of downtown Glendale. The oil is filtered to remove leftover fried bits, water and other contaminants.

Green Dining Network then ships the pure product to a partner west of Buckeye, Amereco Arizona LLC, where it is turned into biodiesel, a fuel that vehicles with diesel engines, such as semitrucks, can use.

Biodiesel is considered a cleaner burning alternative to petroleum and is growing in demand. It has lower emissions, is biodegradable and comes from renewable sources, such as soybeans, decreasing U.S. dependence on foreign oil, according to the National Biodiesel Board.

Other local companies collect restaurants' old vegetable oil for biodiesel production as well, but McCarthy said his company offers added benefits.

"We're not just a trash collector. We're actually trying to [improve your business](#) and make it more profitable," he said.

"And in this economy, that's a huge thing. Everyone's looking for an advantage and a way to market themselves."

The network promises free power-washing of oil storage areas behind eateries three times a year, which is required by health inspectors. Savings can reach \$600 to \$900 annually, McCarthy said.

Participating restaurants receive discounts for such services as janitorial work, tax help and pest control through an association of partner companies. And members can post certificates touting their



Julio Martinez pumps used restaurant vegetable oil into a holding container at Green Dining Network in Glendale.

environmentally friendly involvement, a potential customer draw.

"We call it a dining network: a community of like-minded restaurants, dining patrons and (businesses) that service the restaurants. It's a big family," McCarthy said.

"Our primary mission is to clean up the sky."

Bill Shaeffer, Ameresco Arizona's executive vice president of marketing, says joining Green Dining Network is the "easiest thing to do" to improve restaurants' green image.

"To put up solar panels or these types of things is quite expensive," he said. "This way doesn't cost them anything."

Restaurants typically pay to have used cooking oil safely removed, but Green Dining Network charges nothing.

Shaeffer adds that "absolutely nothing goes to waste" in the biodiesel manufacturing process. By-products are used to create cleaning products for restaurant kitchens and glycerin for water treatment plants.

Lulu Rodriguez, co-owner of Mexican eatery Bitzee Mama's, joined the network a year ago and promptly recommended it to other Glendale restaurants around hers.

"If they can do something with what we throw away, I say more power to them," she said. "We save money this way. Every little bit counts."

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

Green Dining Network services

By joining, restaurants receive for free:

- Container for storing used cooking oil.
- Power wash of storage area every four months.
- Used cooking oil pickup as often as necessary.
- Discounts on services such as grease trap and vent hood cleaning from affiliated companies.
- Certificate of membership to display in the restaurant.
- 24-hour emergency service used oil pickup or cleanup.

Web site: www.greendiningnet.com
Phone: (602) 385-0760