

Company gears up for biodiesel fuel production

By ROD WALTON World Staff Writer

6/15/2007

A new Tulsa firm that designs machines to make biodiesel has hired another local company to build the fuel-production units, and also says it has made its first sales nationwide.

Biodiesel Technologies Inc. hired Sand Springs-based Total Energy Resources Inc. to fabricate and assemble the company's \$1.25 million biodiesel production systems. The 1,280-cubic-foot machines -- called the BPS 400 -- can convert vegetable and animal oils into biofuels for vehicles, Biodiesel Technologies says.

"My feeling is we're at the right place at the right time for the right technology," co-founder and CEO Christian Fleisher said. "Ultimately, we view this as a bridge between now and tomorrow."

Biodiesel Technologies, which moved to Tulsa last year, will change its name to Orbitek later this month, a spokeswoman said.

The company also announced Thursday that it has sold seven machines to bioenergy production plants in Marion County, Ohio, and Dallas. Ohio's NexGen Bioenergy is buying five units, while Dallas' BD Inc. is purchasing two.

The gross sales total, once finalized, would be about \$10 million. The first BPU 400s would focus on soybean oil as its feedstock.

"We're anticipating that the first units would ship in about four months," said Martha Hyde, a Biodiesel Technologies spokeswoman. "We didn't take purchase orders until we were sure that the design was perfect."

Total Energy Resources, meanwhile is hiring about 17 people to focus on fabrication efforts for the BPU 400, Fleisher said.

Biodiesel proponents believe this type of fuel -- using chemical reaction to create diesel fuel from renewable resources like soybeans or canola -- can reduce environmental emissions, help farmers economically and free the United States from its dependence on international petroleum markets.

They also believe the fuel is more efficient to produce than ethanol, which also is made from renewable resources like plants. Ethanol actually takes more energy to make than it delivers, while biodiesel can generate twice as many energy units as it requires for production, Hyde said.

"It makes sense from an energy security standpoint," Fleisher said. "It makes sense for the energy exchange and makes sense for the (local) economy, because captured dollars have a multiplying effect."

Fleisher moved his company from New York to Tulsa last August.

He developed the biodiesel system while collaborating with Cornell University. The BPS 400 was patented last year.

The unit has a maximum potential of producing 4 million gallons of biodiesel fuel annually, Fleisher said. Diesel fuel is used for compression-ignition engines that power many trucks, tractors and other industrial vehicles.

Fleisher also discounted fears that biodiesel may not be clean enough to run conventional diesel engines. He said the engine's inventor started out with a form of biodiesel.

"Rudolf Diesel ran the first diesel engine (at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris) on peanut oil," Fleisher said. "We're basically creating something similar to No. 2 diesel without the toxins associated with it."

Biodiesel Technologies, which now employs seven full- and part-time people, is based in the MidFirst Building at 71st Street and Yale Avenue.