

# Vegawatt's veggie oil generates electricity, hot water

## Powers eatery

By Donna Goodison | Sunday, January 11, 2009 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Business & Markets

Restaurateur George Carey understands the power and economics of oil - vegetable oil, that is.

The owner of Finz Seafood & Grill is now using waste oil from his restaurant's deep-fryers to generate electricity and hot water at his Dedham location and save thousands of dollars in utility costs.

The oil is being recycled into fuel through a Vegawatt, a new clean energy cogeneration system designed for restaurants and food service operators that's produced by Owl Power Co., a Boylston start-up founded last February.

Finz is the first restaurant using the Vegawatt, which essentially is a diesel generator engine that's been converted to run on waste vegetable oil, according to Ben Prentice, Owl Power's vice president of sales. About the size of a commercial reach-in refrigerator, the Vegawatt has cleaning, dewatering and temperature control systems that make it fully automated.

"The restaurateur only has to pour the oil into the Vegawatt and walk away," Prentice said.

Running waste vegetable oil through a diesel engine typically is a more cumbersome process, according to Prentice. To run a car on vegetable oil, it must be started using diesel oil to warm up the vegetable oil in a separate tank to the proper viscosity. Once the vegetable oil reaches the right temperature, a switch is flipped to allow the oil to proceed through a filter for use. Before the car is shut off, it must switch back to diesel so the vegetable oil can be cleared from the engine before it cools down and becomes too thick to flow through.

Owl Power is about ready to start manufacturing the Vegawatt in Worcester for general sales in March.

The initial and primary benefits of the \$22,000 units are financial, according to Prentice. The Vegawatt generates supplemental power that allows restaurants to reduce their electricity and natural gas purchases from the grid, for a about a two-year return on investment.

"A restaurant that has 80 gallons of waste oil per week from their fryers will, in Massachusetts, save over \$10,000 a year in electricity and hot water costs," he said. Restaurants also are eligible for a 10 percent federal tax credit on the purchase.

Sensors in the Vegawatt allow Owl Power to remotely monitor the system's performance via the Internet, and restaurant owners can go online to check its performance, how much electricity is being produced and how much money they're saving.

Restaurants typically have several options for their used vegetable oil, including paying to have it taken away. Rendering companies pay restaurants a small amount per gallon for the oil for use in perfume, cosmetics and soaps, while other companies will buy it to make biodiesel fuel. Vehicle owners who've converted their diesel engines to run on vegetable oil also solicit restaurants to provide it to them for free.

"A year ago, virtually every restaurant was paying to have it taken away," Prentice said. "But because of the great interest in being green, efficiency of operations, reuse of products and the price of oil, there's been a huge increase in the demand for the oil. And now these companies recognize they have to pay for it."

Restaurants typically receive 10 cents to 25 cents per gallon for the oil. Vegawatt owners, meanwhile, realize a value of \$2.55 per gallon, according to Owl Power.

George Carey, owner of Finz Seafood & Grill, learned about the Vegawatt from Owl Power's owners last June at a National Restaurant Association event in Boston that focused on helping eateries become more environmentally friendly. The system has been in use outside the back of his Dedham restaurant for the last 2.5 months.

"We had been selling our oil for biodiesel for a couple of years, but this is a much better concept because it never leaves your building, and it generates electricity," Carey said. "It's a much greener way. There's less of a carbon footprint because the oil that you are recycling doesn't have to be picked up by a truck, brought to another facility, processed and then sent to another facility and sold."

Operation of the Vegawatt also is simple, according to Carey.

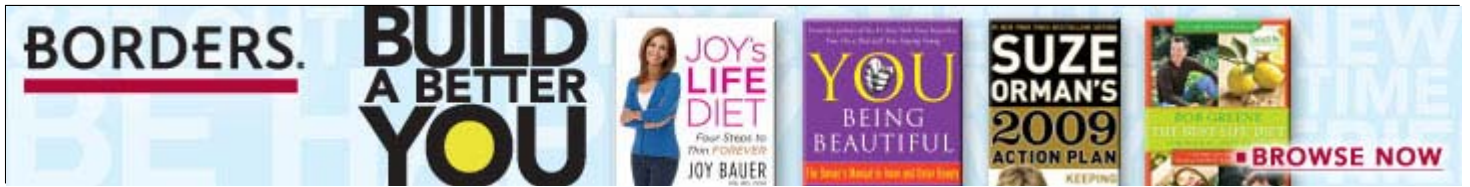
"It's as simple as putting the oil into the generator, and then the generator runs," he said. "I'm very happy with it. Any time I can take a



Photo by Faith Ninivaggi

product like this and reuse it or recycle it on premise and save money at the same time - to generate electricity in this case - it's a wonderful thing."

Article URL: <http://www.bostonherald.com/business/general/view.bg?articleid=1144523>



[Contact us](#) | [Print advertising](#) | [Online advertising](#) | [Herald history](#) | [News tips](#) | [Electronic edition](#) | [Browser upgrade](#) | [Home delivery](#) | [Herald wireless](#)

**Save on Boston Herald Home Delivery**

[Jobs with Herald Media](#)

For back copy information and more information on other collectible copies please call 617-426-3000 Ext. 7714. [Click here for Celtics, Patriots and Red Sox back copies](#)



© Copyright by the Boston Herald and Herald Media.

No portion of BostonHerald.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. [Privacy Commitment](#)