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Erin Prawoko

George Carey Jr., president and owner of Finz Seafood & Grill, talks about the Vegawatt at the restaurant as Robert Peret, vice president of field operations from Owl Power Company, works on the vegetable oil recycler.

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Eatery's Power Play

By Edward B. Colby/Daily News staff

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DEDHAM —

Out the back door from George Carey Jr.'s kitchen is a gray, square, man-sized machine that is changing how Finz Seafood & Grill does business.

Carey's restaurant is the first in the country to use the Vegawatt - a 6-foot-high, 6-foot-wide, 2-foot thick box that converts used vegetable oil into a clean fuel that produces electricity and hot water. Finz's Vegawatt generates 6 kilowatts per hour of electricity, which goes back into the building through an inverter.

Carey, owner of Finz, is still calculating the Vegawatt's effect on his bottom line, but said, "We hope to save over \$1,000 a month, best-case scenario."

Finz's largest line-item expense is utility costs. Carey said the Vegawatt has reduced his energy needs by 10 percent, even though Finz is a large restaurant at 15,000 square feet. Finz uses all the electricity the device produces, he added.

The restaurant used to store its congealed waste oil on site before paying for it to be carted away to a recycling center for processing. Now, whatever vegetable oil Finz buys is "trucked here once, it's used here, and it stays here. It's a one-stop deal, which I love," Carey said.

"It's one of the few things that restaurant owners can do in these tough times that saves us money," he said. "The ability to save money with declining revenues is wonderful."

Carey said he bought his Vegawatt, which cost \$22,000, after meeting James Peret, the CEO of the Boylston-based Owl Power Co., at a green restaurant conference in Boston.

Robert Peret, vice president of field operations for Owl, said the Vegawatt was in development for about 3 years and is being targeted at restaurants. He said the first Vegawatt is in use at Owl Power's headquarters, while Finz has the first field unit, installed in early December.

Carey and Peret would not show what the Vegawatt looks like inside, not wanting to reveal trade secrets.

Used vegetable oil is poured into the device, then treated through an automated four-stage process. Among its attributes, the Vegawatt is quiet and generates no odors, Carey said.

Carey, 49, opened Finz Dedham in the spring of 2007. Finz's first location in Salem opened eight years ago.

Carey said his restaurant, at 910 Washington St., only serves fish that are responsibly farm-raised and responsibly caught by a hook and line - no trawlers.

He said Finz tries to avoid fish that are under duress or are overfished, such as Chilean sea bass.

That said, the Vegawatt is a natural next step for the restaurant.

"We continue to evolve to be more and more green," Carey said.

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