

Apache to open public-access CNG station

by D. Ray Tuttle

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Apache Corp. is constructing a CNG filling station at 5011 S. Vandalia Ave. in Tulsa. (Rip Stell)

TULSA – As a producer of natural gas, Apache Corp. knows the resource’s benefits.

As part of a program to promote vehicles running on compressed natural gas, the Houston-based energy company is installing its first public-access filling station in the state, near Interstate 44 and Yale Avenue in Tulsa.

Apache purchased 0.97 acres for the interior lot location from Sunny Investment Properties LLC for \$250,000, according to Tulsa County records. Mendy Parish, Mark Inman, Stuart Graham and Caitlin Boewe with CB Richard Ellis |Oklahoma represented the seller. Rob Stephens with Commercial Oklahoma Inc. represented the buyer.

Apache expects to have the station operational by mid-January, said Frank Chapel, Apache director of natural gas transportation fuels. He served as a consultant for Apache for two years until March 1, when Apache hired him full time to lead and expand the CNG efforts across company operations.

“We have completed the permitting process and have just about done the site work,” Chapel said. The stand-alone station will have card access for Apache fleet drivers and the public.

Natural gas is clean and abundant, Chapel said. In 2009 Apache began converting its U.S. field vehicles to CNG and building stations at Chickasha, Elk City and Woodward in Oklahoma. Apache also has opened operations in Texas and New Mexico. Apache has exploration and production operations in Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas and New Mexico.

Besides Apache, Oklahoma City-based Chesapeake Energy Corp. has opened compressed natural gas fueling stations in Oklahoma. Oklahoma Natural Gas Co., a subsidiary of Tulsa-based Oneok Inc., operates public-access CNG stations in Oklahoma City, Tulsa and 18 other communities.

“We started a program in September to give incentives to our employees to switch to CNG,” said Chapel. The Apache program provides employees 50-percent reimbursement – either from the company or state tax incentives – of the incremental cost for a CNG-dedicated or converted vehicle, plus a \$5,000 gas card for the purchase of CNG, Chapel said.

The public-access station will offer several flow rates, up to 6 gallons per hour, Chapel said. The gas is compressed to a pressure of about 3,600 pounds per square inch and stored in a fuel cylinder aboard the vehicle. CNG flows from the fuel cylinder into the engine’s combustion chamber and is ignited to create power to drive the vehicle.

According to the International Association for Natural Gas Vehicles, the number of natural gas vehicles and fueling stations grew 17.2 percent in the U.S. during 2009, with an annual average growth of 27.4 percent in the past nine years.

Today there are more than 110,000 natural gas vehicles and 1,300 CNG fueling stations in the U.S., according to the International Association for Natural Gas Vehicles.

While the number of NGVs and stations is growing, the U.S. still lags behind other nations, Chapel said.

All told, there are more than 11 million CNG vehicles and 16,000 stations worldwide, according to the IANGV.

Switching to natural gas is expected to reduce America's dependence on imported oil, which now accounts for more than 70 percent of our petroleum supply, Chapel said.

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