

Officials Pumped About E85's Future

By Jason Busch of The Monroe Times

Charging only 85 cents for a gallon of E85 fuel, Monroe's Smart Station E85 fuel station celebrated its grand opening and ribbon cutting Monday with local politicians and area dignitaries on hand to participate in the festivities.

From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. the station, located near the Badger State Ethanol plant, charged just 85 cents per gallon for E85 as a promotional offer in celebration of its grand opening.

On hand to participate in the grand opening ceremonies were John Malchine, CEO and chairman of the board for Badger State Ethanol; Gary Kramer, president and general manager of Badger State Ethanol; Monroe Mayor Bill Ross; Rod Nilsestuen, Wisconsin secretary of agriculture; Reps. Brett Davis, R-Oregon and Stephen Freese, R-Dodgeville; and State Sen. Dan Kapanke, R-LaCrosse, among many others.

Kramer said the response for the new fuel station was overwhelming. "I think we're on the right track here today. The fuel here is American made and I'm really pleased with how this whole thing is coming off. Our partnership with the City of Monroe helped turn this vision into reality."

Malchine said he's pleased to bring an affordable fuel alternative to Monroe. "It's been a dream of ours to get this gas station in Monroe, where people pay only as much as the fuel is worth," Malchine said. "When this concept was proposed to the city five years ago, it was quite a concept for us to wrap our arms around," Ross said. "But we became educated and the community came together and said this could be a really good thing for the City of Monroe." "And we learned a new word, thermal oxidizer," Ross joked. "I've received calls from mayors all over the state and calls from out of state asking what this experience has been like. And I can tell them it's become one of the real success stories for Monroe."

Nilsestuen said the U.S. is going to see a growing need and dependency on alternative fuel sources and the demand for E85 fuel already is here. "And it will be greater in the next few years," he said.

Freese agreed, using the celebration as a platform to discuss legislation to mandate E-10 fuel (with 10 percent ethanol) in the state of Wisconsin. "There are 17 (E85) stations running right now in Wisconsin," Freese said. "We've introduced legislation in Wisconsin that's similar to what's already been passed in Minnesota, Wyoming and Hawaii." He added passing the E-10 legislation is an important step forward for Wisconsin, one that will make it easier for the state to decrease its dependency on foreign oil and increase its consumption of corn grown throughout the state.

Davis, who has worked closely with Freese on the E-10 bill, said "it's a great example of a bipartisan effort to get something done right. You don't have to look far to see the positive effect the ethanol plant already has had on the area and the state. Almost 50 jobs have been created right here in Monroe and corn prices have increased all over the region".

Kapanke summed up the afternoon's proceedings by telling everyone gathered outside the E85 station about his trip to Monroe.

"I'm from La Crosse," Kapanke said, "and I took the long way down here today. I saw acre after acre of corn fields the entire way, some which had been harvested and others ready to be. I've already told my friends in the petroleum industry to invest in ethanol because it's where the future lies. I hope we can have a lot more messages (in this state) like this one here today."