



Danny Games, an executive with Chesapeake Energy, explains his home's car fueling station to North Little Rock Mayor Patrick Hays. (Photo by Jeremy Peppas/Stephens Media)

By Jeremy Peppas
Stephens Media

NORTH LITTLE ROCK — Danny Games fills up his SUV every night without ever having to leave home.

Earlier this year, the Chesapeake Energy executive had his 2009 Tahoe retrofitted to burn compressed natural gas, and had a Phill-brand natural gas home refueling unit installed in his carport. Games said as far as natural gas utility CenterPoint Energy knows, his home refueling station is the only one of its kind in the state.

When Games gets home at night, he runs a thin yellow cord from the unit and attaches it to his vehicle. While the exercise looks about the same as a car filling up at a gasoline pump, there's a big difference in the cost, he said.

"It has been about 50 percent less than the cost of unleaded," Games said.

Besides the cost, CNG is friendlier to the environment. A U.S. Department of Energy study determined CNG reduced carbon dioxide emissions by up to 30 percent and other pollutants by up to 90 percent.

"It burns cleaner. It doesn't produce the particulates you get from petroleum," Game said. "The beauty of this for Arkansas is that it is literally coming out of the ground here."

Arkansas ranked 12th among the 32 natural gas producing states in 2006 and 2007 when the state had 3.3 trillion cubic feet of proved natural gas reserves, the University of Arkansas Center for Business and

Economic Research said in an August report citing the national Energy Information Administration.

Production has been buoyed in recent years by exploration in the Fayetteville Shale play in north-central Arkansas, one of the nation's 10-largest natural gas fields. Chesapeake Energy is among the largest players in the Fayetteville Shale play.

The CNG refueling unit Games had installed at his home cost about \$4,000 but came with a \$2,000 tax credit. He had a separate meter put in for it and also had a second electric meter installed because he wanted a complete accounting of the cost associated with having his SUV run on compressed natural gas.

OEM Systems, an Oklahoma company, converted the Tahoe. The conversion cost roughly \$12,000 and included some changes to the engine and installing a CNG tank where the spare tire is located on a regular Tahoe. The gasoline tank was left intact.

The CNG tank stores 9.2 gallons of natural gas, which Games said is enough to take his vehicle about 180 miles. If he empties the tank before reaching his destination, he could push a button on the front dash to switch to the gasoline tank without stopping.

The Phill unit takes the natural gas from the meter at Games' home and compresses it down to roughly 3,000 PSI, then a regulator installed in his vehicle's engine reverts the gas to regular atmospheric pressure to burn as fuel in the vehicle.

Games said putting a gallon of CNG in the tank takes about two hours. Totally filling an empty tank could take 18 hours, though Games said he drives to and from work — about 100 miles per day — without coming close to the vehicle's total range.

A spokesman with OEM said the only car produced in the U.S. equipped to burn CNG is the Honda Civic NGV. The cost of a new model starts around \$25,000 — compared to the \$23,800 price tag on a Civic hybrid and \$15,000 for a standard model — and the nearest dealer that stocks the vehicle is in New York.

In Arkansas, Little Rock National Airport has a commercial CNG refueling station and Arkansas Oklahoma Gas operates a CNG station in Fort Smith.

Games recently showed his home unit to North Little Rock Mayor Patrick Hays, Alderman Beth White, who lives down the street from Games in the Lakewood neighborhood, and Michael Drake, who works in the Mayor's office.

Hays arrived in his hybrid Honda, a veritable gas-guzzler compared to the Games' Tahoe.

Both Hays and Games said the real advantage for CNG is with commercial fleets.

Mass transit buses, school buses, street sweepers and garbage trucks are among the vehicles being made to run on CNG.

"It is the future," Hays said. "We have to get ready for it."

Earlier this year, the mayor failed in an attempt to persuade the Central Arkansas Transit Authority to convert its bus fleet to CNG. The Transit Authority concluded the \$5.2 million cost for replacing eight

buses with CNG models and building two CNG refueling stations was too steep.

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