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MARKETPLACE

Hometown Business • Hometown Deals

CNG filling station opens in Holmes County

by *kylevalentini*

A little more than a year ago, Dwain Schlabach started hearing about compressed natural gas (CNG) as a fuel for vehicles. As the owner of Mt. Eaton Pallet, Ltd., he quickly realized that CNG, at half the price of gasoline, could save his company a lot of money in fuel costs.

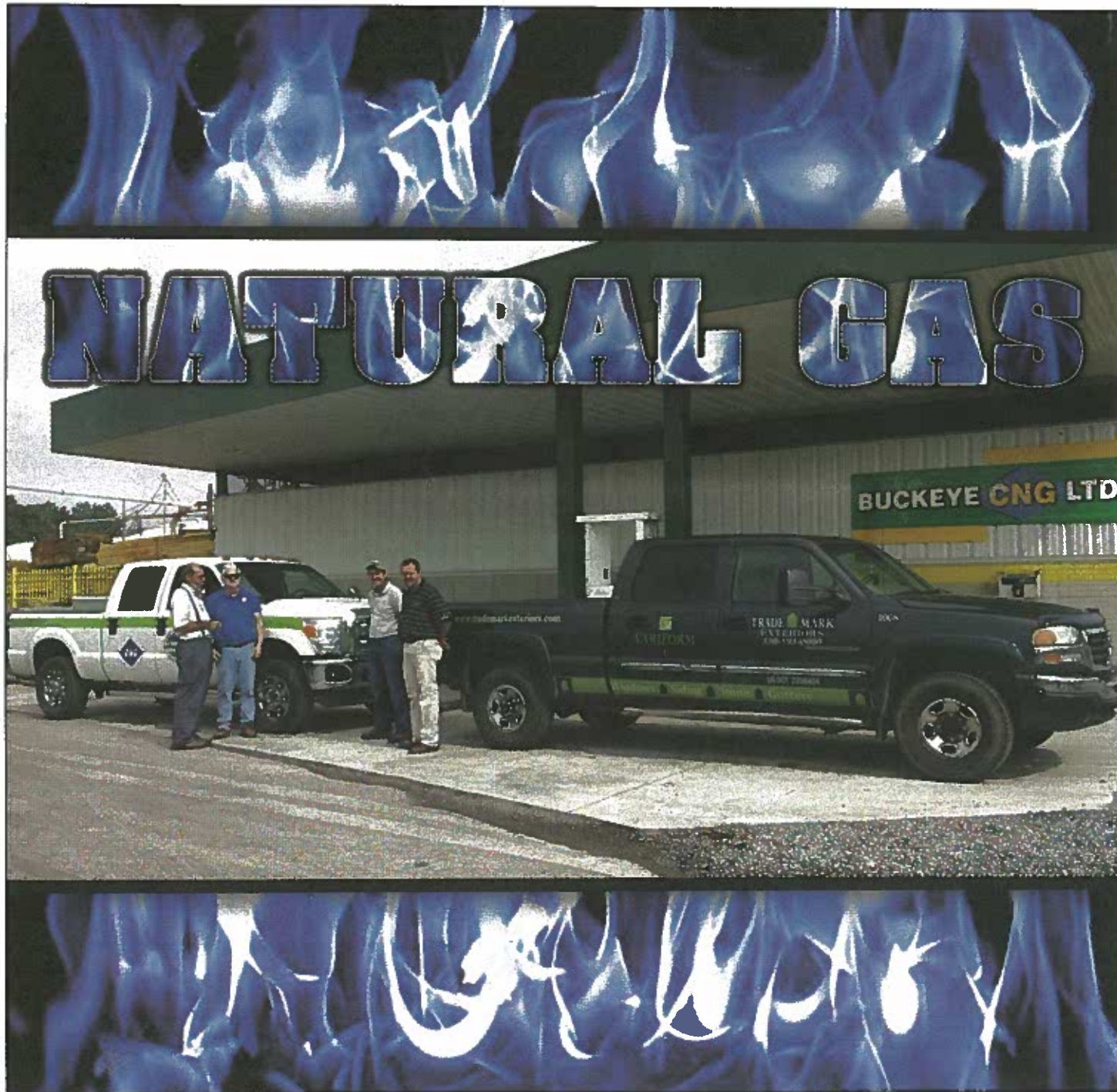
"It didn't take me long to figure out that this is the way Mt. Eaton Pallet can probably save money," said Dwain Schlabach. "I started doing research and realized that CNG is abundant, affordable, clean and domestic. Why not convert my vans and tow motors and use CNG?"

The more he learned, the more he wanted to install a private filling station at his business. Schlabach shared his ideas with longtime friend Larry Keim, who agreed the idea had merit. "Larry never hesitated," said Schlabach. "He said if I wanted a partner he was in."

Buckeye CNG, Ltd. was formed, and on August 23, slightly behind schedule, Steve Lapp, president of Trademark Exteriors at Millersburg, became the first official customer. "We are fortunate to have an in-house service garage for our fleet of vehicles," said Lapp. "We are gradually converting all 28 of our vehicles to CNG now that we have a filling station in the area."

"Originally I was thinking about personal use for the company and how it could save us money," said Schlabach. "But I thought that if I'm going to spend all that money, it's not difficult to spend a little bit more money and make it available for other people."

Schlabach realized that the steps
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(L-R) Dwain Schlabach, John Mack, Larry Keim and Steve Lapp celebrate the unofficial but significant grand opening of Buckeye CNG, Holmes County's first compressed natural gas filling station for vehicles. Kyle Valentini photo/Randy McKee photo illustration

CNG

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to construct a station available to the public were not much different from a private operation. "This won't be a true public station because you won't be able to use your credit card," said Schlabach. "Anyone can come in and sign a contract and get a card. That card tracks their purchases and they get an invoice from us later."

Buckeye CNG, Ltd. chose Cobey Energy of Buffalo, N.Y. to provide and install the filling station components. The contract includes supply of a gas dryer, CE-C50 CNG

compressor module, ASME storage spheres, dispenser and a card reader.

"We're very excited to be working with Buckeye CNG, Ltd. Buckeye CNG is ahead of the curve in adopting natural gas as a viable, cost effective alternative fuel to meet their energy needs. This project highlights the effective use of Ohio's energy resources spurred from development and utilization of the Marcellus and Utica shale plays," said Craig Jackson, business development manager for Cobey Energy.

"We are on the cusp of the biggest change in my generation," said Schlabach. "Natural gas will be the biggest change to this

country and this area in my lifetime. Research shows that there is more than a 100-year supply of natural gas and I believe there is more to be discovered."

Buckeye CNG, Ltd. is Holmes County's first CNG station. There are three stations in Coshocton, another three in Canton and one in Orrville. Others are located in Cleveland and Columbus, with more being planned around the state.

John Mack, who serves as a building inspector for the East Central Ohio Building Authority (ECOBA) was excited to have a CNG station located in Holmes County. "We were driving up to Canton to fill our trucks and now

we can purchase fuel closer to home," said Mack.

Nearly any vehicle can be converted to use natural gas, but the price tag is high at \$6,000 to \$10,000 per conversion, according to Walnut Valley Repair. The shop, located at Charm, does conversions using only certified Department of Transportation parts.

"I truly believe that natural gas is the biggest game changer in our lifetime," said Schlabach. "If it happens that we never sell another BTU to anyone else, it will still save me money here at Mt. Eaton Pallet."

Buckeye CNG is located at 4761 County Road 207, Millersburg.