

Roth: CNG, baseball and apple pie

THE JOURNAL RECORD

There is something uniquely American about summer with our cookouts, road trips, baseball and the ever-present sound of cicadas filling the heated sky around us.

There is also something uniquely American about a good business idea that comes to life through hard work and domestic, Oklahoma energy.

This July Fourth as you travel to a daytime baseball game or venture out along America's roadways, please know that you could be doing so at about one-half the cost for fuel if you are driving a compressed natural gas vehicle. And if you live around the central Oklahoma area, you need to meet a new Oklahoman who is making these family savings possible for people every day.

I recently met Craig Wright, who is the president of CNG Interstate, which converts vehicles to a bi-fuel system that allows them to burn natural gas or gasoline. That means you can choose your fuel of choice depending on wherever you stop to fill up. CNG Interstate does both personal and fleet vehicle conversions. The uniquely American part of Craig's story is how he seized an opportunity to "do good" and grow a business all at the same time. Craig became interested in CNG conversions because of the troubling issues surrounding America's dependence on foreign oil. He thinks natural gas is an important piece of our national energy puzzle because it's domestic, abundant, cleaner and cheaper. And we can all see the value in that.

Craig even saw the value in Oklahoma as a place to grow a business. Craig started this company a handful of years ago in St. George, Utah. He traveled the globe looking for the best CNG conversion system. He started in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where there are 3.5 million natural gas vehicles on the roads, which proved to him that CNG was a viable option for America. Next was Italy, before finding his system in the Netherlands.

While in Utah, Craig noticed that a significant portion of his business was coming from Oklahoma. Impressed with Oklahoma's business climate and energy resources, Craig took out a six-month lease at an Edmond location and set up shop. Business was so good that Craig decided to move his family and his company headquarters to Edmond. The company has grown almost 600 percent since moving to Oklahoma last summer.

Craig said a CNG vehicle can operate at up to 70 percent lower costs than a similar vehicle powered by gasoline. And for so many reasons, foreign and domestic, CNG vehicles must be a major component of our country's energy plan. We have an abundant domestic supply of natural gas. It's better for our environment and can help reduce our dependence on foreign oil. True energy independence.

Conventional wisdom suggests that as CNG fueling infrastructure continues to grow, and with the state's tax credit and the new OCC rebate plan through ONG, that more people and companies will look at the economic benefits of conversion. It is important for Oklahoma and other states to continue to beef up fueling infrastructure, so that the American road trip can be cleaner and cheaper from sea to shining sea.

Happy Independence Day, America.

Jim Roth, a former Oklahoma corporation commissioner, is an attorney with Phillips Murrah P.C. in Oklahoma City, where his practice focuses on clean, green energy for Oklahoma.