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### City restaurant waste targeted for **biodiesel**

**BYLINE:** Lauren B. Cooper

Xenerga Inc. is targeting Birmingham, along with Mobile and Montgomery, for a new **biodiesel** production facility, which would be able to produce up to 15,000 gallons of the alternative fuel a day.

With an ever-increasing interest in ethanol and **biodiesel**, and President Bush's call for mandatory fuel standards of 35 billion gallons of renewable and alternative fuel by 2017, the alternative fuel industry looks to be on the verge of a boom.

The company is looking for area partners to invest nearly \$2 million in a five million gallon per year plant, which will produce **biodiesel** from waste cooking oil.

**Biodiesel** is a clean-burning alternative fuel, which is made from renewable resources, usually soybeans. Studies have shown that when blended with petroleum the use of **biodiesel** can further the life of a vehicle and substantially reduce pollution.

Xenerga has set a plan in place to build smaller **biodiesel** facilities in all the major metropolitan areas in the United States, said Dave Jarrett, chief communications officer for the company.

Xenerga's first U.S. location will soon open in Orlando and will become the prototype for all future locations. In addition to becoming company headquarters, the site will showcase its German technology for potential investors and be used as a training center for all future facilities, Jarrett said.

Some of the executives of the company, said Jarrett, have been involved in establishing more than 100 of these facilities across Europe and Asia, and others have been involved with FiltaFry, a franchisor of on-site fryer oil filtration and fryer management for restaurants.

Jarrett said interest from investors so far has been phenomenal. When information went out about the Orlando facility late last year, he said they received more than 500 calls from investors, and that from now until March the company has 78 small groups from across the country planning to tour the facility.

Phillip Wiedmeyer, chairman and president of the alternative-fuels advocate Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition, said **biodiesel** has taken off in Alabama with facilities in Birmingham - such as Rice Oil's new production plant - Moundville, Daphne, Eufaula and others to be announced this year.

"I think Alabama is a great place for an alternative fuel business," he said. "And there is a lot of potential to grow a large alternative fuel business in Alabama. The future is bright. Especially when the cellulosic process for producing ethanol is perfected. Alabama can be a leader in the nation in alternative fuel."

Ethanol, another clean-burning alternative fuel, is usually made from corn, and its use has been growing by leaps and bounds across the country and especially in Alabama, said Wiedmeyer. He pointed to a visit from President Bush last year to the ethanol refueling station for Hoover's police department, and a recent grant given by the U.S. Department of Energy to install ethanol and **bio-diesel** refueling stations along Interstate 65, from Lake Michigan to the Gulf of Mexico, incorporating alternative fuels into existing infrastructure.

While there is nothing magical about the technology of making **biodiesel**, Wiedmeyer said, he does see the challenge in economically collecting a continuous supply of cooking oil from multiple sources. He believes that is what has held back the commercial use of waste cooking oil for **bio-diesel** production.

Nancy Thacker, director of communications for the Alabama Restaurant Association, said she'll believe it when she sees it.

"There has been a lot of talk about **biodiesel**," she said. "But I have seen no reports of people being able to produce it yet (from waste cooking oil)."

Thacker said she has seen mixed feelings from the state's restaurants about using the oil to make **biodiesel**, mainly because a lot of people don't understand the concept, but thinks once they are educated on the process the industry would be very receptive.

Xenerga's Jarrett said the business model is simple and profitable. Once a site has been selected, preferably in a light industrial area and near an alternative fuel blender, the facility can be constructed on a concrete slab, covered by a metal building and assembled by the company in as little as five days. He said 95 percent of the nearly \$2 million investment goes towards construction and installation costs.

Jarrett said the company has a national contract with Minnesota-based Restaurant Technologies Inc., which acquires oil from restaurants nationwide. According to RTI's Web site, the company does have a depot site in Birmingham.