



CENEX® C-STORE RENOVATION LEAVES LASTING LEGACY



Introducing LIFT, a lighting, image and facilities transformation initiative designed to revamp Cenex c-stores through a series of exterior and interior updates. LIFT provides Cenex retailers with the freedom and flexibility to renovate their stores how they see fit, all with the resources and support of CHS, a leading global agribusiness owned by farmers, ranchers and cooperatives across the United States.

Grabbing gas or a Snickers bar doesn't scratch the surface when it comes to modern convenience store offerings. Consumer needs have shifted profoundly during Bernhardt's tenure, with shoppers now seeking a greater sense of fulfillment, whether through product offerings, ease of shopping or interactions with employees. To keep pace with this evolution, Bernhardt was continually assessing the role that technology and other amenities might play in satisfying these needs.

Under Bernhardt, Enerbase operates several Cenex-branded c-stores in North Dakota. As CEO, Bernhardt's duties often exceed the number of hours in a day. Ultimately, you're only as good as the team you surround yourself with. That's where his partnership with CHS representatives Michele Smith,

"I'M ALWAYS THINKING BIG AND HAVE A FEW IDEAS TUCKED UP MY SLEEVE. BEING ABLE TO VET THOSE WITH MICHELE AND PAT THROUGH OUR CENEX PARTNERSHIP AND LEAN ON THEIR INDUSTRY EXPERTISE IS WHAT REALLY GOT THE BALL ROLLING."

"OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH CENEX BROUGHT US NEW THINKING AND SOME COMPELLING TREND DATA. THEY UNDERSTOOD HOW THE DATA COULD BE APPLIED TO OUR BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET."



Thirty-six years and counting — that's how long Enerbase Cooperative CEO Tony Bernhardt has been in the c-store game. Suffice it to say he knows a thing or two about the importance of customer service.



CHS direct brand specialist, and Pat Shea, CHS c-store retail specialist, helped bring the renovation to life.

The Cenex® brand's new LIFT initiative provides retailers with the freedom and flexibility to renovate their stores how they see fit. Through the exterior portion of the program, Halo, the Cenex brand invests in the forecourt image of branded c-stores. While forecourt upgrades will happen at all locations, supporting the independence of each store is an important aspect of LIFT.

Over the years, Bernhardt and his team have seen it all, tackling c-store upgrades from new pumps to P.O.S. systems and everything in between. But they'd never undertaken a complete overhaul like the one they'd set their sights on for the Cenex-branded location in Minot, N.D. One of the factors that helped Bernhardt and his board sleep a little easier at night was knowing they could utilize the Cenex LIFT initiative's 0% financing* option for qualifying in-store upgrades.

“COMMITTING TO A STORE REMODEL OF THIS MAGNITUDE, GOING OVER BUDGET IS SIMPLY NOT AN OPTION. CHS HELPED EASE THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF THE RENOVATIONS AND CONNECTED US WITH TRUSTWORTHY VENDORS WHO HELPED US STAY WITHIN BUDGET AND GOT THE JOB DONE RIGHT.”

There was no shortage of new and industry-leading upgrades implemented by Bernhardt and his team. The remodel included a 2,500-square-foot addition, which allowed for a kitchen expansion, new coolers and freezers, an updated entryway, refreshed restrooms, upgraded countertops and cabinetry, new LED lighting throughout the store and more. The renovations Bernhardt implemented through the LIFT initiative have already helped the location see an uptick in sales, and he expects that trend to continue.

One of the big splashes made through the renovation was a new grab-and-go feature. Bernhardt included an open-air cooler to offer healthier options in addition to a bakery case, several to-go hot food options and a new coffee station. Not only are these upgrades what the community has been craving, but they're additions the employees are excited to share.

“Our research showed that coffee consumption wasn't limited to mornings, especially in hardworking communities like Minot,” said Smith. “That's why we worked with Tony and his team to install a bean-to-cup coffee area with more flavors and options that's always fresh, 24-7. There was such excitement with the customers, just with there being something new, and the employees were excited to be able to help the customers try it out.”



Having an understanding of your natural surroundings is also an important factor when determining which amenities to pursue. This Enerbase location is on a major thoroughfare and is the last stop when leaving town. To help make the Cenex-branded location a place more inclusive of everything



people may need when on their way to the lake or out of town, Bernhardt decided to add a walk-in beer cave.

“We’ve noticed that the beer cave has drummed up a lot of excitement and that there was a need for it at our location,” said Bernhardt. “People would already stop here for their gas and food, so this is just another way we are making the most of this location for the community and travelers.”

Most of Enerbase’s c-stores were built in the 1980s and ‘90s. When considering how much else has changed in the past 30 to 40 years, making upgrades to enhance the technology and functionality of the space was key. The Minot location was no exception. Bernhardt worked with Smith and Shea to not only determine that an increase in the square footage was necessary to make the layout of the store more functional, but to tap into partners offered through the LIFT initiative to add safety features throughout the store.

“Tony made the bathrooms completely automated so customers don’t need to touch anything,” said Shea. “We also worked with him to determine that a self-checkout would be a great addition to this location. Based on what I’ve seen, I think these will be a trending feature for c-stores as folks are looking to get in and out faster than ever.”

*In-store loans include a rate of interest equal to five percent (5%) per annum. For qualified applicants, CHS Inc. - Refined Fuels shall make payments of interest on loan directly to lender on borrower’s behalf.

After seeing the success of a self-checkout at the Minot Enerbase, Bernhardt plans to install this feature at other locations as well. By adding new features one location at a time, Bernhardt is able to test and learn, continuously optimizing the experience people have in his stores along the way.

Bernhardt didn’t stop the renovations at the interior. The Minot Enerbase is one of the Cenex®-branded locations that has already undergone a Halo image upgrade. The goal of Halo is to elevate the consumer experience at all Cenex-branded locations through many forecourt updates, like updating canopy branding elements with a 360-degree LED light band, a new Cenex logo and a three-dimensional backlit blue arch. Bernhardt worked with Smith to extend the exterior upgrades, including an LED Enerbase sign that was added to the front of the building and a new reader board.

“We worked with Tony to figure out how he could further improve the exterior,” said Smith. “The upgrades we landed on complement the Halo updates beautifully. We included a new fascia wrap around the building and a more modern price sign to make it more relevant to their current offerings.”

Throughout the renovation, Bernhardt always came back to the need to make sure his employees were excited about the transformation of the store. He knows well that if a major part of the customer experience lies with the employees, their excitement can rub off on customers. ■



“WORKING WITH CHS ON THIS RENOVATION HAS GIVEN OUR EMPLOYEES A NEW BEAT IN THEIR STEP, AND THEY’RE EXCITED TO SHARE HOW THE UPDATES HAVE TAKEN THIS LOCATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL.”

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