

# Its Own Little Corner of the World

CornerStone Market brings Little Oil Co. back to c-store operations after 20 years

By Danielle Romano

CornerStone Market LLC was three years in the making. It was during the 95th anniversary celebration of Little Oil Co. Inc. that owner Stratford Ward decided it was time for a new convenience store, seeing as the company hadn't operated or opened one in 20 years.

A family business, Richmond, Va.-based Little Oil Co. was founded in 1921 by Ward's grandfather. The company distributes motor fuels to convenience stores, service stations and commercial customers throughout Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina.

its grand opening on Oct. 6. Located at 501 W. Atlantic St. in Emporia and sitting on a 1-acre lot, the 5,000-square-foot store is unique in a number of ways.

The first way is that CornerStone Market features a 1,082-square-foot Subway restaurant — the only one of its kind in this community of 15,000 people. CornerStone Subway LLC is owned by Ward and Jill Slate.

The second way is with its BP-branded motor fuel offering, which is the first BP located in the north-bound lane of Interstate 95 in the state of Virginia.

CornerStone Market is also the first c-store in Virginia made of precast concrete. This construction type is quicker to install, sturdier and less expensive than normal types, according to Barry Gizzard, sales manager for Little Oil Co., who came up with the store's name.

Gizzard thought up the moniker based on the building's stone exterior and the c-store's positioning on a street corner. The use of stone is carried through to the store's entrance columns, beer cave entrance, primary ID sign base, and fountain drink area as well.

## SWEET SURPRISES IN-STORE

Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, CornerStone Market is a foodservice- and beverage-centric convenience store. In addition to the Subway restaurant, customers can find an array of hot and freshly prepared Hunt Brothers Pizza menu items to choose from, from slices of pizza to whole pies, to wings and WingBites, and cheese breadsticks.

The store also has an accompanying roller grill station, which features a Hillshire Farms hot dog program, complete with four types of hot dogs and breakfast sausages.

On the sweeter side, a Southern Sweets fresh doughnut program, Flavor Burst soft-serve ice cream offering, and Razzle milkshake program are



CornerStone Market celebrated its grand opening in early October.

Alongside the owners of home and commercial building contracting company Slate and Spivey — Clint Slate, Chris Slate and Billy Slate, who together are a 50-percent partner in CornerStone Market — Ward and Little Oil Co. set out to bring a new c-store and Subway restaurant to Emporia, Va.

With the goal of taking a fresh approach to the c-store business, CornerStone Market celebrated



Twelve LED televisions positioned throughout CornerStone Market provide abundant marketing opportunities.



CornerStone Market’s “secret weapon” in setting itself apart from the traditional convenience foodservice offerings, according to Terry Johnson, CornerStone Market’s retail designer.

“Our doughnut program is our biggest surprise at the store. We bring in the product frozen, then we proof, heat and ice each doughnut in-house for the best freshness available,” he told *Convenience Store News*. Fresh doughnuts are made every four hours.

For beverage-seeking customers, CornerStone Market features a hot coffee program, which was designed in partnership with S&D Coffee Inc. Four coffee blends can be customized with an array of flavor shots and specialty toppings. On the cold and frozen dispensed beverage side, the store has a 16-head fountain dispenser with flavor shots, as well as a Caribbean Crème frozen beverage unit offering four flavors.

Some additional amenities of CornerStone Market are:

- A beer cave that’s always set to 28 degrees;
- A craft beer section that allows customers to create their own six-packs;
- A cold case stocked with fresh fruit, sandwiches and beverages;
- Touchless, airport-style restrooms;
- Virginia Lottery;
- An ATM machine;
- 45 parking spots; and
- 48-inch LED TVs (12 of them) for digital and video advertising.

### PRIMED FOR HIGH TRAFFIC

CornerStone Market is well-positioned to attract locals, tourists and professional drivers with its prime Interstate 95 location. According to Gizzard, Emporia serves as the main interchange going north or south on I-95, and marks the halfway point between Maine and Florida.

“It is the perfect combination of interstate traffic

and local traffic,” he commented.

As drivers approach Virginia from North Carolina on the interstate, they will see and recognize the unmistakable BP logo, as it sits high atop a LED price sign and reader board.

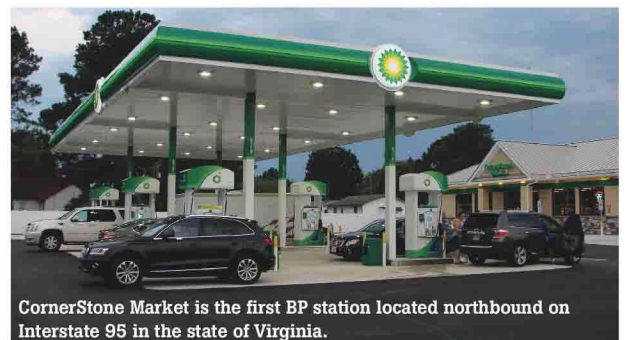
CornerStone Market has 12 fueling positions for gasoline and four for diesel. All of the dispensers have 10-inch television screens that display daily media provided by Gilbarco and VNet Media, including The Weather Channel, NBC Sports and news, plus store ads.

Coinciding with its BP fuel offering, the BP Rewards program is available to CornerStone Market customers. Members receive 50 cents off per gallon for every \$100 spent on gas and diesel for 90 days, followed by 10 cents off per gallon on an ongoing basis.

“This is a great way for our customers to be rewarded and for them to save a lot of money. This is the best program in the oil industry right now,” Gizzard expressed.

CornerStone Market BP was just recognized as the No. 1 BP Rewards site in October in Virginia and in the top 10 in the country, he added.

The Emporia location is not expected to be a one-off for Little Oil Co. and Slate and Spivey. The partners believe CornerStone Market is positioned to grow by at least one new store a year. **CSN**



CornerStone Market is the first BP station located northbound on Interstate 95 in the state of Virginia.