

Kenly 95 Unveils New Look and Brand



Kenly 95 Truckstop in Kenly, N.C.

BY AIMEE CIRUCCI

Worth every ounce of sweat. That's how Ernie Brame, general manager of Kenly 95 Truckstop in Kenly, N.C., sums up a recently completed 18-month renovation project at his facility. And though Brame says it was worth every ounce of sweat, he also concedes that operating the truckstop while under construction was not easy. His tongue-in-cheek advice for those considering a similar project: "Go on vacation."

Brame, however, did not go on vacation and instead managed the truckstop through a construction project that included the addition of a 65-foot lighthouse, a new 35,000-square-foot main building, and a 150-seat full-service restaurant. He stressed that truckstops hoping to stay open during a renovation must have an unwavering focus on their driver customers.

"Keep the driver in mind," Brame explained. "Do right by them, reduce the hindrances and provide as much access as possible to the facility."

Both Brame and the management at Iowa 80 Group, which owns Kenly 95, have been pleased with the results of the renovation, including the increase in public

interest and sales. The lighthouse has become a popular photo spot and regularly appears on Facebook, according to Brame, who said it has a "huge wow affect." In addition to the attention, sales have "skyrocketed" among drivers and locals in the Chrome Shop, which sells truck accessories. In fact, the sheer size of Kenly 95 post-renovation has led some visitors to use it as an indoor walking facility.

On the heels of the completed construction, Kenly 95 embarked on a rebranding, officially becoming a Petro truckstop in July. Petro is a good fit for Kenly, according to Brame, who describes



Ernie Brame

it as the merger of a premier facility and a premier brand. The transition to Petro was, he says, "quick and painless," in part because both parties saw it as beneficial. Kenly 95 was happy to transition their restaurant to the popular Iron Skillet brand, and Petro was pleased to gain coverage in the important I-95 corridor (Kenly 95 is the only Petro truckstop between Bordentown, N.J., and Brunswick, Ga.).

Due to the scale and success of the renovation, the stakes are now even higher for Kenly 95, which is one of the largest truckstops on the East Coast. Brame shares the worries of most truckstop operators concerned about the possibility of tolling on I-95. His solution is to spend much of his time educating state politicians about the unintended consequences of tolling, including congestion and safety concerns of shifting traffic to secondary roads.

He's also keeping an eye on the status of rest area commercialization in North Carolina and surrounding states. Although he said there are too few areas with enough space between interchanges to make commercialization viable in the state, Brame is keeping tabs on what he adamantly opposes.

The most noticeable result of Kenly 95's recent renovation, its large lighthouse, is more than a photo op; it speaks to the mission of the truckstop to offer a welcoming beacon and place of rest on the road. While times, trucks and the people who drive them may change, the need for services on the highway will not. Kenly 95 strives to deliver more than just basic services, but authentic hospitality for professional drivers and the driving public. Ernie Brame mixed humility and humor to explain it this way: "We have a very nice facility. The nicest truckstop east of Walcott, Iowa." ●