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EDUCATING REAL ESTATE AGENTS

STEVE RELYEA

Sitting in on some National Oilheat Research Alliance (NORA) presentations for real estate agents, Jim Proulx and Maribeth Girard found that most of the agents' questions had to do with propane, and the questions revealed that some agents had misinformation about propane.

Back in the office at Proulx Oil & Propane (Newmarket, N.H.), they had also noticed that a lot of real estate agents would call when they had a closing, to ask about settling the fuel at closing, tank ownership, and other homeowner-related questions.

"Many were not well versed on the subject and we realized they needed our help and we saw this as an opportunity to educate them on all things propane," Girard says.

Proulx, president/CEO of Proulx Oil & Propane, and Girard, marketing assistant at the company, decided to do just that. Today, they offer a continuing education course for real estate agents called "Everything to Know About Propane Gas." The class is approved for three continuing education credits in New Hampshire and Maine. (Like most states, these states require real estate agents to complete continuing education classes.)

"Many states require that only a licensed real estate school can offer courses for credit," Girard says. "In our case, New Hampshire and Maine do not, so we are able to offer them through this application process. We are also accredited in Ohio."

Key topics in the course include safety; dispelling the myths about propane; how to handle the fuel at closings; who owns the tank; easements; where propane comes from; supply points; and availability.

"It's all about making sure they have the knowledge of how propane works, so they can convey to homeowners and builders the safety aspects to be aware of, whether it is proper venting, tank distances, buried tanks, etc., or the value of energy-efficient, low-emission, cleaner-burning propane appliances," Girard explains. "Arming them with the correct information just makes them more valuable to the buyer or seller."

As this was written, they had held the class five times. To make it easy for agents to attend, Proulx and Girard have held the class at real estate offices and at the Seacoast Board of Realtors office. They bring lunch. Girard notes, "All the real estate agents have to do is show up, which is also why I think they like it!"

She concludes, "Students comment at the end of the three-hour course that they were skeptical that we could talk about propane for three hours, but do while making it very related to what they encounter every day when showing homes."

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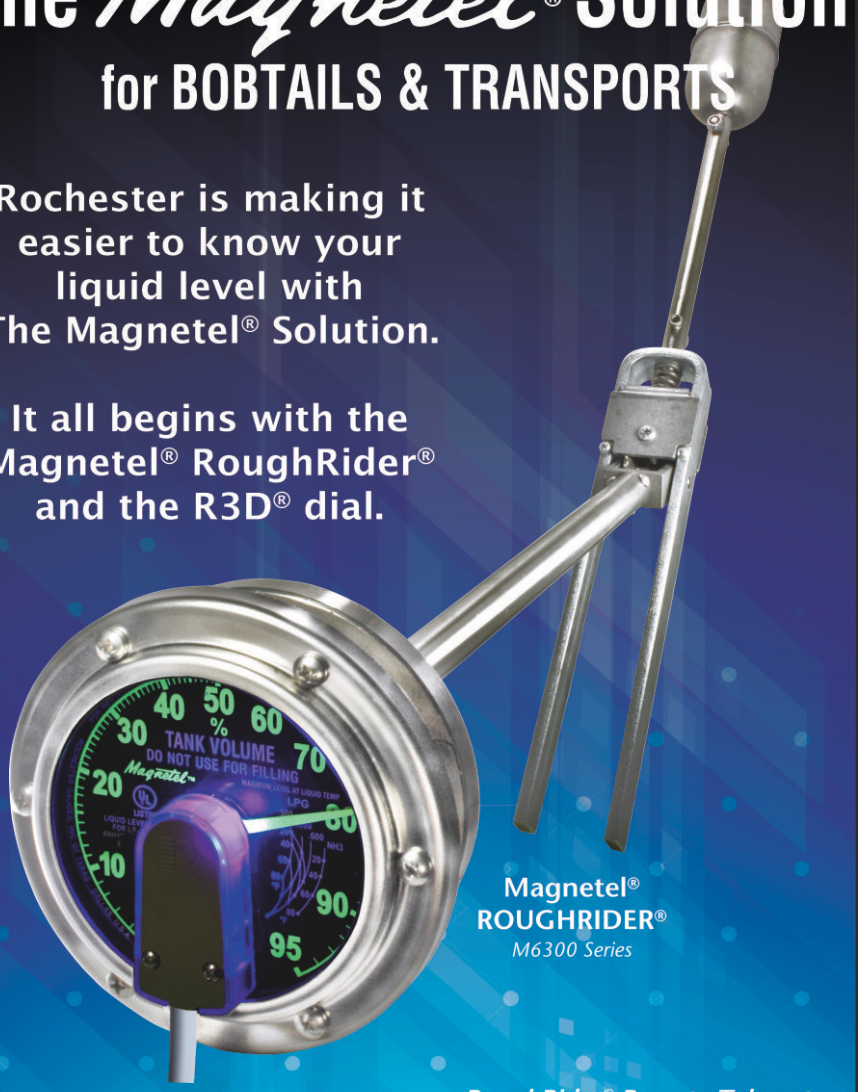
OUR COVER

In this issue, truck builders share safety tips for those who build, maintain, or drive vehicles. Photo courtesy Jason Soulon, Westmor Industries.

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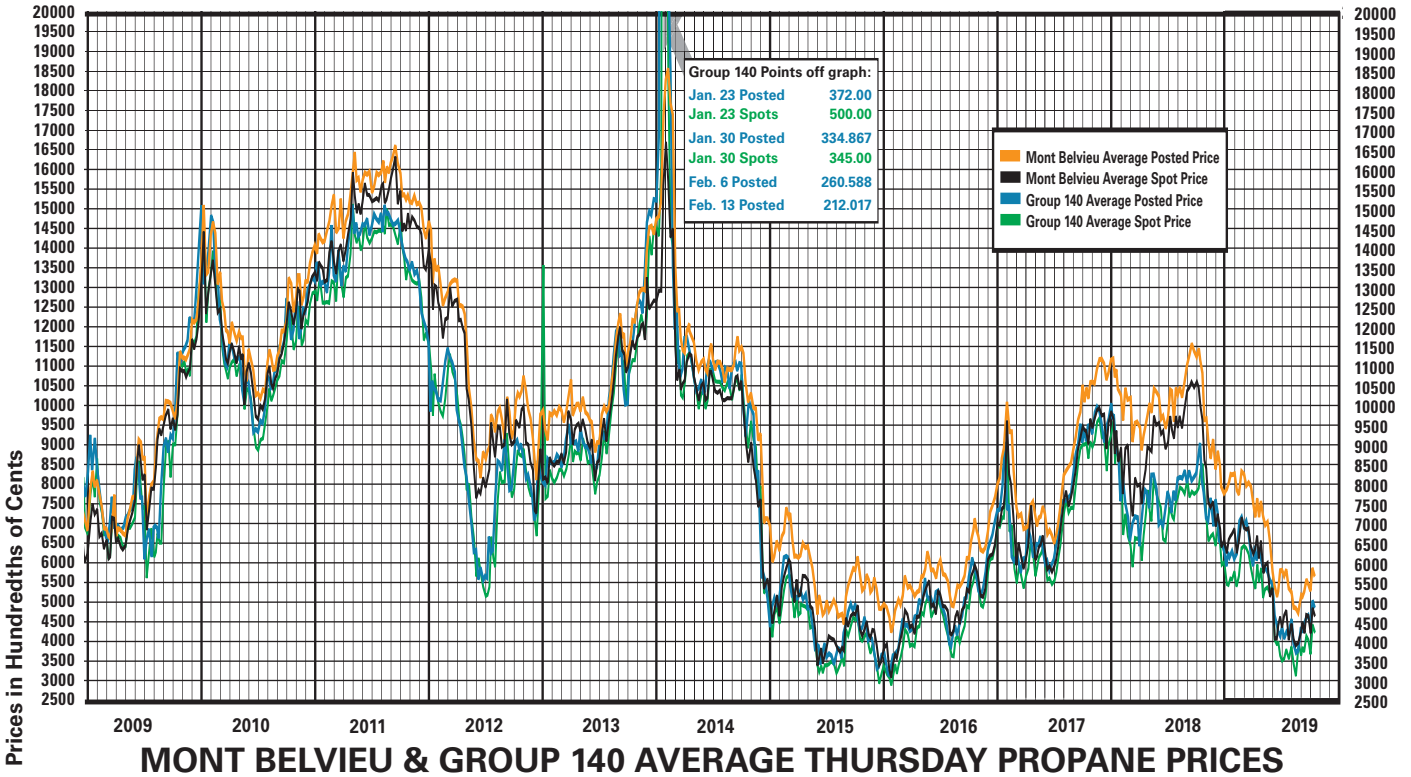
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MONT BELVIEU & GROUP 140 AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES

MID-WEEK AVERAGE POSTED/ SPOT PROPANE PRICES

(Cents per Gallon)

Date	Mont Belvieu		Group 140	
	POSTED	SPOT	POSTED	SPOT
9-19-19	55.423	45.875-46.875	45.100	40.75-41.125
9-26-19	54.173	45.875-46.375	45.700	39.75-40.25
10-3-19	52.923	41.75-42.00	43.850	36.00-36.75
10-10-19	58.840	46.50-48.50	50.150	43.25-44.25
10-17-19	56.340	45.25-46.25	48.340	41.50-42.125

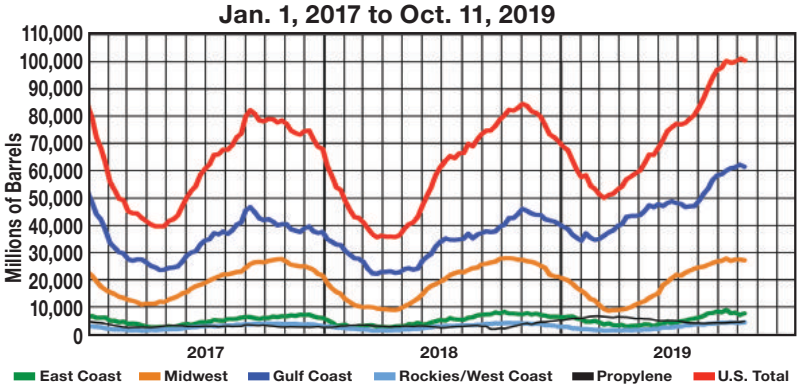
U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Sept. 13, 2019 to Oct. 11, 2019 and One Year Ago

	9/13/19	9/20/19	9/27/19	10/4/19	10/11/19	10/12/18
East Coast	8,862	7,677	7,919	7,046	7,611	7,606
Midwest	27,829	26,941	27,464	27,475	27,166	27,939
Gulf Coast	59,863	60,763	61,119	62,115	61,349	42,660
Rockies/West	4,140	4,289	4,140	4,137	4,318	4,093
U.S. Total	100,694	99,670	100,641	100,773	100,445	82,298
Propylene	4,174	4,301	4,377	4,418	4,651	2,404

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Jan. 1, 2017 to Oct. 11, 2019



U.S. RESIDENTIAL PROPANE PRICES

(Mid-Month, Cents per Gallon)

Region	Date		
	10-19	9-19	10-18
East Coast (PADD I)	257.2	N/A	321.0
Midwest (PADD II)	140.6	N/A	177.9
Average U.S.	185.4	N/A	240.2

Source: "This Week in Petroleum," Energy Information Administration

CANADIAN INVENTORIES

(Oct. 1, 2019)

Thousand Cubic Meters

PROPANE

Region	10-19	9-19	Change	10-18
Propane—East	512.5	458.2	+11.9%	554.8
Propane–West	800.5	835.6	–4.2%	1300.3
Total Propane	**1313.0**	**1293.8**	**+1.5%**	**1855.1**

BUTANE

Butane—East	366.1	445.1	–17.7%	489.7
Butane—West	484.8	607.0	–20.1%	1032.1
Total Butane	**850.9**	**1052.2**	**–19.1%**	**1521.7**

Source: National Energy Board

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UKRAINE IMPORTS U.S. LPG CARGO

Reuters reports that Ukraine imported its first cargo of LPG from the U.S. in September, quoting traders and Refinitiv Eikon data, as Kiev seeks to cut its dependence on energy supplies from Moscow. The carrier *Ladybower* with about 6000 tonnes of LPG arrived at the Black Sea port of Odessa Sept. 9.

Russia has been one of the main LPG suppliers to Ukraine, but the country wants to diversify its sources due to political tensions with Moscow. According to sources, the cargo was reloaded Sept. 4-5 from the very large gas carrier *Globe Atlas*, on passage from Houston, to the small gas carrier *Ladybower* near Limassol, Cyprus.

Traders noted that *Ladybower* was delayed in being offloaded near Odessa owing to a lack of LPG storage capacity. They said the Ukrainian company Ukrtatnafta had bought the cargo from international trader Vitol (Geneva). Vitol does not comment on its commercial operations. Ukrtatnafta did not reply to requests for comment. According to a Ukrainian industrial organization, the share of direct Russian LPG supplied to Ukraine last year fell to 36.8% from 48% in 2017. Further, starting Aug. 1, Ukraine introduced tariffs on imports of Russian LPG and diesel.

LIGHT ENDS MARKET PREPARES FOR WINTER

S&P Global Platts reports that the Asian light-ends market was taking on characteristics inherent to winter, with regional LPG prices set to rise from two-year lows on improving fundamentals. Asian LPG prices, which had sunk amid ample supply and low crude oil futures prices, are expected to stir latent demand as winter nears in north Asia.

In addition, demand for the fuel from the household sectors in India and Indonesia is also healthy, sources said. Spot Indian demand reemerged in September from state-run Hindustan Petroleum Corp. Ltd. and Indian Oil Corp. as high pre-election inventory started to wane, and ahead of the festive season in the fourth quarter.

In Indonesia, state-owned Pertamina was seeking another parcel for September after already purchasing two spot cargos for September delivery, sources said. Coupled with a lack of exports from Iran—which comprise mixed propane/butane cargos—due to U.S. sanctions, Asia will continue to receive less butane, sources added. The premium for butane, which is shorter in supply than propane, widened to about $14 to $15 a metric tonne as a result.

PERMITS REQUIRED IN LPG SECTOR

Kenya's Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority has published new guidelines that outlaw the transportation of retail LPG cylinders without a permit from the authority, reports the Kenya Broadcasting Corp. Breaching the regulations will lead to a fine of 10 million shillings or a five-year imprisonment upon conviction.

The Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority says all LPG cylinder retailers, wholesalers, and transporters are required to be licensed—for each business location—and be license-specific to the authorized cylinder brands only. The panel says the move is geared toward enhancing safety and to deal with rising cases of illegal LPG cylinder refilling that is eating into profit margins of licensed dealers.

SIBUR AND GAZPROM AGREE ON SUPPLIES

Sibur, one of Russia's largest petrochemical companies, said in September it had reached an agreement with Gazprom on LPG supplies to a yet-to-be-built plant, ahead of Russia's natural gas pipeline launch to China. Reuters reports that the deal could expedite an investment decision by the petrochemical company to build a gas and chemical complex in the Amur region near Russia's border with China.

Under the deal, Gazprom will supply the new complex between 1.1 million tonnes and 1.5 million tonnes of LPG, and may increase potential deliveries of ethane by 400,000 tonnes annually. "We would like to make an investment decision by the end of the year," Sergey Komyshan, Sibur executive director, told Reuters. LPG is the key feedstock for petrochemical production at Sibur's planned complex.

"China is experiencing, and will keep having, a deficit in polyethylene," Komyshan said. "Around 2024-2025, we expect demand for polyethylene to grow by 10 million tonnes."

The construction project could be completed as early as 2024, he added. His company estimates it could boost its annual polyethylene capacity with the addition of the new facility to 2.3 million tonnes from 1.5 million tonnes now, as well as produce about 400,000 tonnes of polypropylene.

Meanwhile, Russia, one of the top oil exporters to China, is set to launch a natural gas export pipeline in December. Its LPG supplies to China remain small at this stage, but Moscow is planning to expand its output and exports.

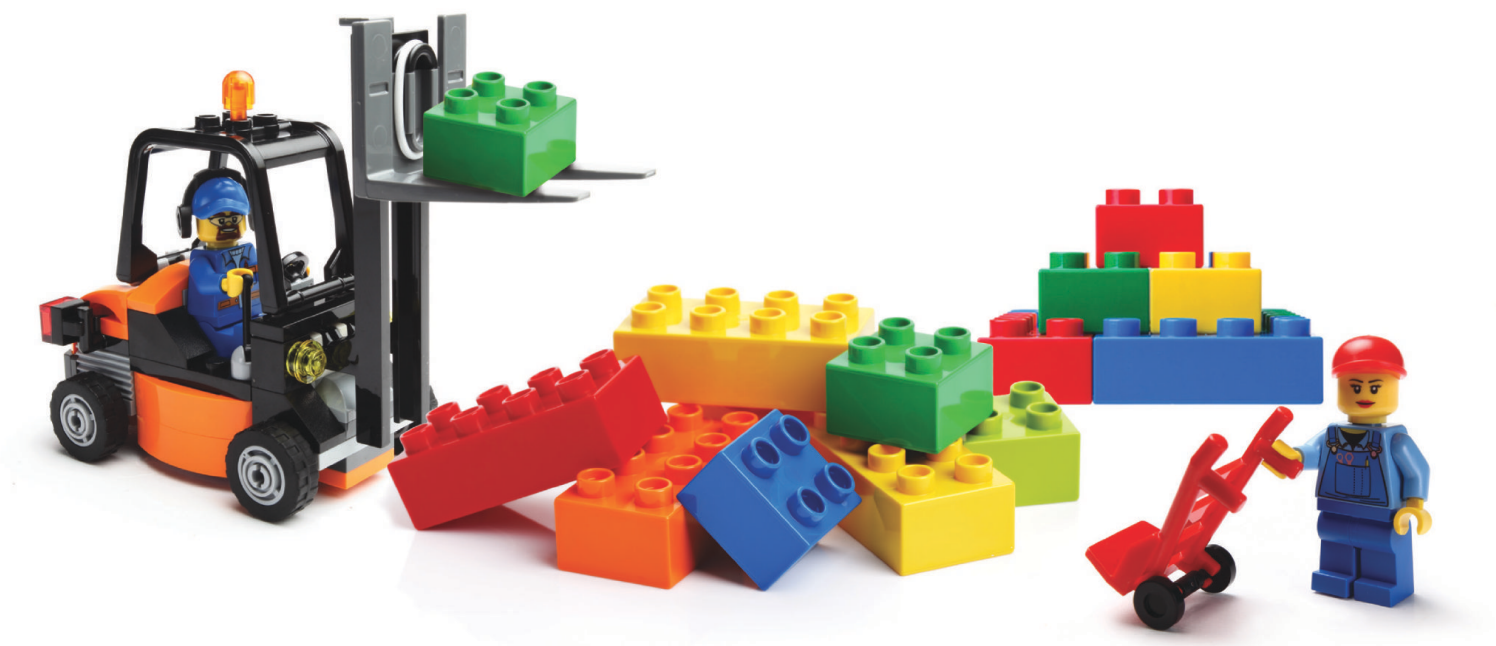
INDIA ACHIEVES CONNECTION TARGET

India in late August and early September achieved its goal of providing free LPG connections to 80 million low-income households, six months ahead of the March 2020 deadline, sources from state-run energy firms tell S&P Global Platts. While some sources said this could stall further distribution of connections, others maintained 80 million households was an initial target under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship welfare initiative, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, or PMUY, program.

"These are all government-driven. It is possible that the government will extend the scheme further by increasing the number [of connections] and the industry will have to follow," one source said, adding that imports will continue to rise as well. Modi's government first raised the target in February to 80 million connections from about 50 million.

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POLICE TAKE DOWN PROPANE THEFT RING

Authorities have captured six members of a gang dedicated to the theft and sale of propane in the State of Mexico, reports *Mexico Daily News*. The investigation and operation was carried out by the Federal Police and the attorney general's office, with support from Pemex.

Following an investigation, a judge issued a search warrant for three buildings in the municipality of Ecatepec and one in Texcoco, identified as the "Don Manuel" boarding house in Los Reyes Zacatepec. Police said the buildings were used to store propane stolen from the Cactus-Guadalajara pipeline.

Federal authorities have requested custody of the boarding house from the municipality of Texcoco while the investigation proceeds. Authorities also seized 42 tanker trucks and 222,000 liters of propane. LPG theft cost Pemex and other suppliers as much as $415.9 million in 2018, according to the LPG Gas Distributors Association. Seventy percent of the financial damage was absorbed by the state oil company, which lost an average of $40 million a month; private distributors' monthly losses were about $17.1 million.

TEXOL ACQUIRES NEW ROLLING STOCK

United Wagon Co., one of Russia's leading manufacturers of rail-freight rolling stock, will supply 400 articulated LPG tank cars to TEXOL Group by early 2021 on top of the 400 already purchased this year, reports Global Railway Review. TEXOL is a large railway operator and freight car owner in Kazakhstan.

The 15-9541-01 tank rolling stock, for transporting propane, butane, and their mixtures, is unique in the Commonwealth of Independent States market. The rolling stock is noted for its increased loading capacity of 90 tonnes and tank volume of 163.1 cu meters. The design solutions used enable operators to save on tariffs, significantly reducing operating costs.

The rolling stock has two tanks connected by a clearance-free articulated joint designed to accommodate increased longitudinal and vertical loads, and provides unobstructed passage for the articulated rolling stock running alone or coupled with standard rolling stock along straight and curved sections of track. The linear dimensions and design make it possible to operate the tank cars on both public and private tracks.

"We have a stable flow of orders for LPG transportation on both domestic and international routes spanning long distances, primarily from Irkutsk Oil Co.," said Sergey Gorsky, a member of the board of directors of TexolTrans. "To handle the orders, we need modern rolling stock that would ensure high efficiency of our shipments."



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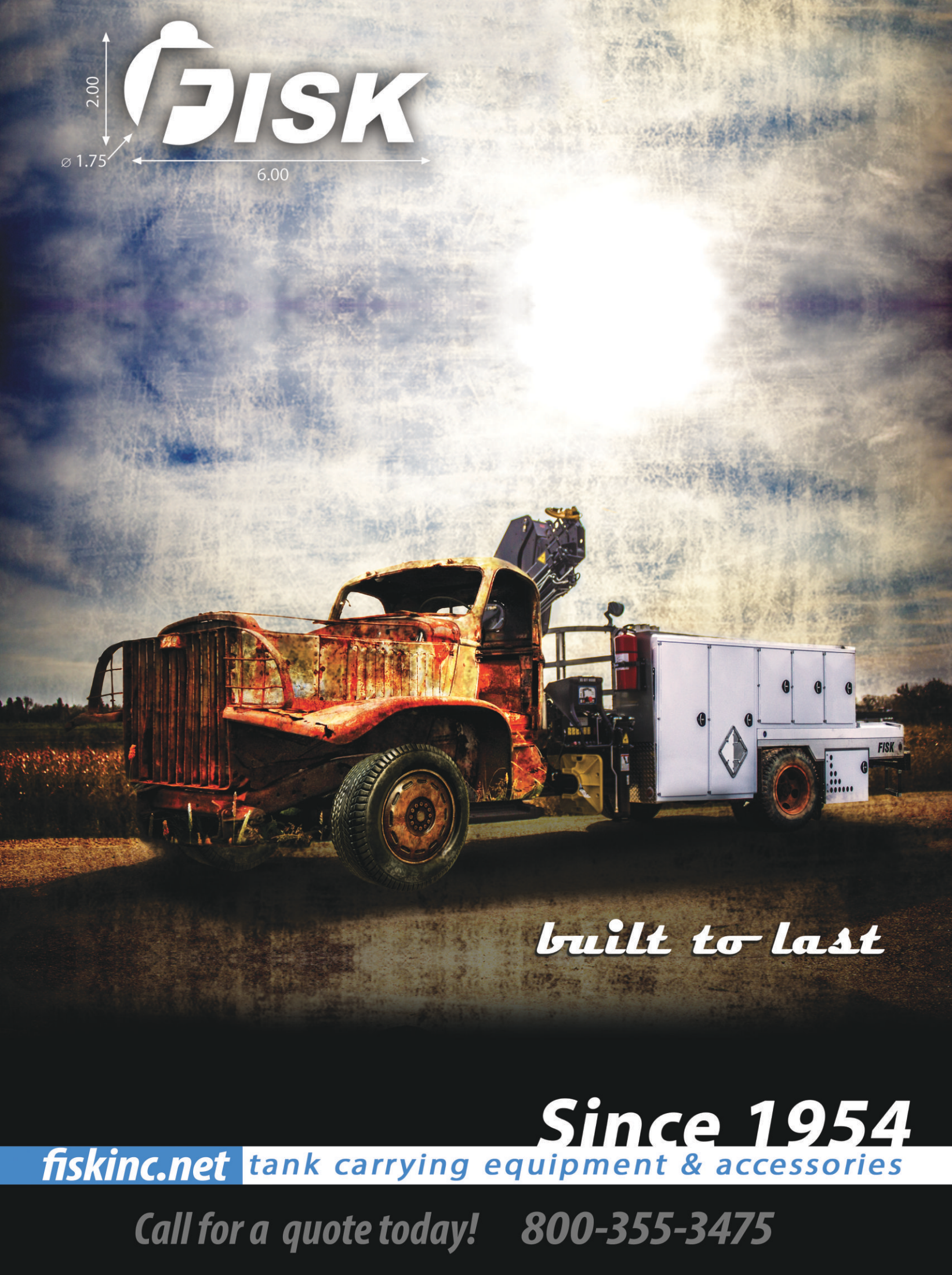
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PARACO GAS INVESTS IN RECRUITING TECHS AND DRIVERS

Paraco Gas of Rye Brook, N.Y. is investing in new ways to recruit drivers and technicians as the industry faces challenges in attracting employees. The family-owned company has introduced a new benefits package with some untraditional perks for those in the driving and service fields.

It offers parental leave for employees who have completed one year of service, tuition reimbursement, and a revised paid time-off policy. The benefits are part of a comprehensive benefits package that Paraco Gas offers full-time, regular employees and dependents, including, but not limited to, the traditional medical, dental, vision, 401K, flexible spending, life insurance, disability income, sick leave, and paid holidays.

"Our ultimate goal is to get customers their propane safely, but also focus on a best-in-class customer experience," said Christina Armentano, executive vice president of sales and business development. "We've decided to think creatively on how to position the company to attract and retain the next generation of drivers and service technicians. We are now focusing on the employee experience, offering newer benefits that are more likely to entice and retain a healthy workforce."

Paraco is also working to empower employees by offering a referral program to boost workforce numbers, and by providing an apprenticeship program for service technicians, which includes paying for classes and assigning a mentor throughout the training process.

"We recognize how important work/life balance and support for personal and professional growth have become with the younger generation, and we need to adapt to their needs if we want them to consider joining our family," Armentano said.

EXPORT EXPANSION STARTUP REPORTED BY ENTERPRISE

Enterprise Products Partners' (Houston) latest expansion of LPG export capacity at its Enterprise Hydrocarbons Terminal (EHT) on the Houston Ship Channel is now online. Company spokesman Rick Rainey confirmed the startup to S&P Global Platts Oct. 11. "We are in the process of commissioning and will be ramping up," he said.

The 175,000-bbld build-out increases the terminal's export capacity to 775,000 bbld. In July, Enterprise said further expansions were coming, including another 260,000 bbld of LPG loading capability to start up in the third quarter of 2020. When finished, EHT will have more than 1 MMbbld of LPG export capacity. "Of course, three or four cargos more can have an impact on the global market," a trade source told S&P Global Platts. Another trader noted that more outflows were expected to boost freight rates.

Enterprise is also adding 67,200 bbld of propylene export capacity at the terminal, with new refrigeration facilities. When that comes online in the fourth quarter of 2020, the company will increase its flexibility by attaining the ability to co-load fully refrigerated, polymer-grade propylene and LPG on the same vessel.

Further, the company is constructing an eighth dock at the Houston Hydrocarbons Terminal that will have the ability to load up to 840,000 bbld of crude oil. This will boost Enterprise's overall crude export capacity to 2.75 MMbbld. The dock is expected to begin service in the fourth quarter of next year and will be able to accommodate Suezmax vessels, the largest ship class able to navigate the Houston Ship Channel.

NEW PERC TOOL COMPARES ELECTRIC AND PROPANE FORKLIFTS

The Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) has made available a free online calculator that allows facility managers to quickly determine how much they could save by operating propane-fueled forklifts. According to data from PERC, propane forklifts cost less than other options at acquisition, and capital costs are nearly 30% less than electric. Visit *Propane.com/Forklift-Cost-Calculator* to view the new cost calculator.

Electric forklifts also incur more utility and infrastructure costs to keep them charged, whereas with propane, facility managers are only responsible for buying and storing cylinders, as well as the cost of purchasing the unit and fuel. "With this new tool, facility managers can have the data at their fingertips, giving them an easier way to compare the operational costs between forklift fuels," said Jeremy Wishart, director of off-road business development at PERC. "In the end, many facility managers are surprised to learn that, when compared with other forklift fuels, propane has proven to be the most cost-effective option."

To calculate potential savings, users input a few data points such as the number of forklifts, usage hours, forklift purchase amounts, and fuel price. The calculator will then provide the overall cost comparisons between propane and electric lifts, including operating costs (inclusive of batteries and fuel), along with total ownership costs and potential savings.

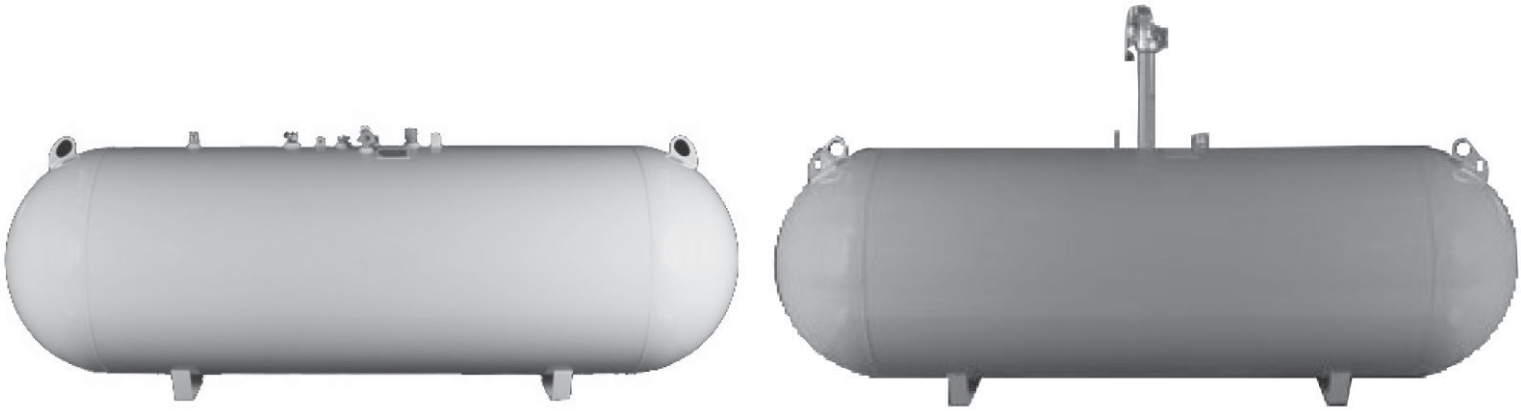
ASHRAE BOARD REJECTS ADDENDUM TO STANDARD

The National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) reports that over the last few years it has joined other fuel gas industry partners to oppose an "extremely stringent sizing criteria" for unvented heaters that was proposed for ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers) 62.2—Standard for Ventilation and Acceptable Indoor Air Quality in Low-Rise Residential Buildings.

Approval of the proposal would have resulted in an effective ban of unvented room heaters in buildings that comply with the standard. However, NPGA received good news when it

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was notified that the ASHRAE board of directors rejected the proposal based on previous objections and appeals submitted by the association and others.

Part of the reason the ASHRAE board pushed back was related to complaints raised in the appeals process, contending that the committee responsible for writing the standard did not provide fair opportunity for technical objections to be heard and evaluated by the panel. By not providing such opportunities, the committee violated ASHRAE procedures.

NPGA comments that it is uncertain at this point where the issue of unvented heaters' effect on indoor air quality will head. The ASHRAE Standards Committee has jurisdiction over the 62.2 Development Committee, and it is likely that the proposed addendum will be returned for further development. A more inclusive approach will allow for better industry involvement and can potentially generate reliable data to support any future proposals to change ASHRAE 62.2.

EIA SEES LESS SPENDING FOR WINTER HEATING FUELS

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) expects that average expenditures for the major home heating fuels will decline for most households this winter compared to last year, owing to warmer forecast temperatures across much of the country. The agency's Winter Fuels Outlook forecast notes that changes in household heating expenditures vary significantly by fuel choice and by region. For the average household, EIA expects that both natural gas and electricity bills will decrease by 1%, fueloil by 4%, and propane by a marked 15%.

However, in contrast to the national average, EIA forecasts that expenditures will increase for homes that heat with natural gas in the Midwest and South as a result of higher retail natural gas prices. Although the lower average expenditures forecast largely reflect warmer forecast temperatures this winter compared with the winter of 2018-2019, a colder-than-average winter could lead to increases in expenditures compared to last winter.

In addition, retail fueloil prices could rise above those forecast as the result of ongoing uncertainties, such as the effect global sulfur restrictions on marine fuels set to go into effect in January, will have on world distillate fuel markets. Of note is distillate fuel inventories in the Northeast, the main residential fueloil market, are low heading into winter.

For its Winter Fuels Outlook, EIA defines the winter season as October through March. The average household winter heating fuel expenditures discussed are a broad measure for comparing recent winters. Fuel expenditures for individual





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households are highly dependent on the size and energy efficiency of homes and their heating equipment, along with thermostat setting, local weather conditions, and market size.

Based on the most recent forecast of heating degree days (HDD) from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), EIA expects temperatures for winter 2019-2020 to be warmer than last winter for most of the U.S. On a national-average basis, temperatures last winter were slightly colder than the most recent 10-winter average. HDD are an approximate measure of how cold temperatures are compared with a base temperature—more HDD indicate colder temperatures. On average, EIA expects total HDD for this winter across the nation to be 4% less than last winter. The forecast does vary among U.S. regions and forecasts range from 7% fewer HDD than last winter in the Midwest to no change in the South.

EIA adds that although NOAA forecasts temperatures this winter to be warmer than last year, weather can be unpredictable. The winters of 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 were generally colder than normal, while the winters of 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 were much warmer.

About 5% of all U.S. households, many in the Midwest and Northeast, use propane as their primary space-heating fuel. EIA expects these households to spend 15% less on average for heating this winter compared with last. The agency expects that households heating with propane in the Northeast will spend an average of $228, or 12%, less this winter, a result of prices that are 10% lower and average household consumption that is forecast to be 3% less. EIA expects households in the Midwest to spend an average of $236, or 17%, less this winter, reflecting prices that are about 12% lower and consumption that is off 6%.

When forecasting expenditures, EIA does not account for the fact that propane consumers purchase fuel ahead of its use, but rather assumes consumers pay the prevailing retail price at the time it's consumed.

In the 10%-colder-than-forecast scenario, EIA's projected expenditures for propane are similar to last winter in the Northeast, with prices that are 16 cents/gal., or 5%, less than last winter and 5% higher consumption. Midwest expenditures are forecast to be $108 more than last winter, or 11 cents/gal., or 6%, higher than last winter and 2% greater consumption.

Propane inventories typically build between April and October and begin to draw down in late-September or October when agricultural use rises and temperatures begin to drop. U.S. propane inventories, including propylene, were 100.6 MMbbl on Sept. 27, some 15% higher than the five-year average for that time of year. The ample U.S. inventories were primarily the result of stocks in the Gulf Coast that stood 23% higher than the five-year average, while most other regions were well above average, with the exception of the Midwest, where volumes were nearer to the five-year average



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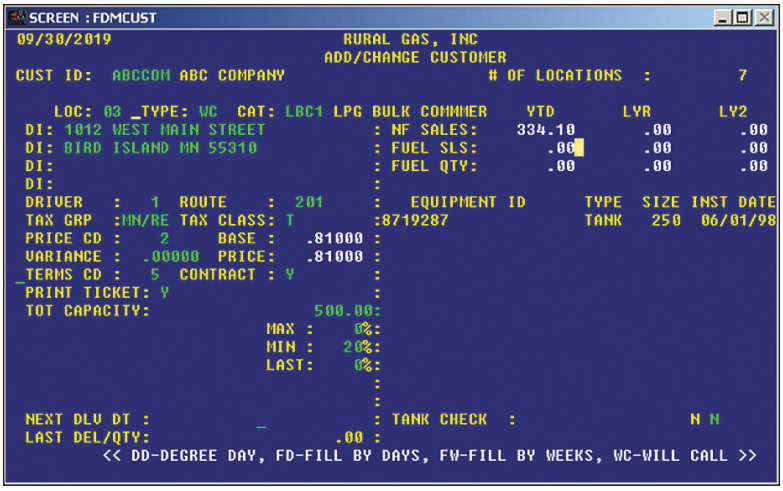
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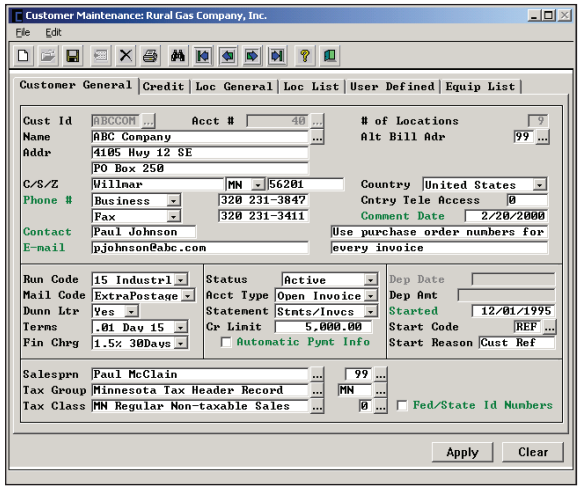
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Shown from left are RCC's initial text screens in 1982; the Windows version with hyperlinks and pop-up data calendars in 1998; a more user-friendly screen with graphs and more color in 2009; and the ultimate in graphics, screen sizing, color, and modern black backgrounds in the new version 10.

RCC: 40 YEARS OF GROWTH AND CHANGE

PAT THORNTON

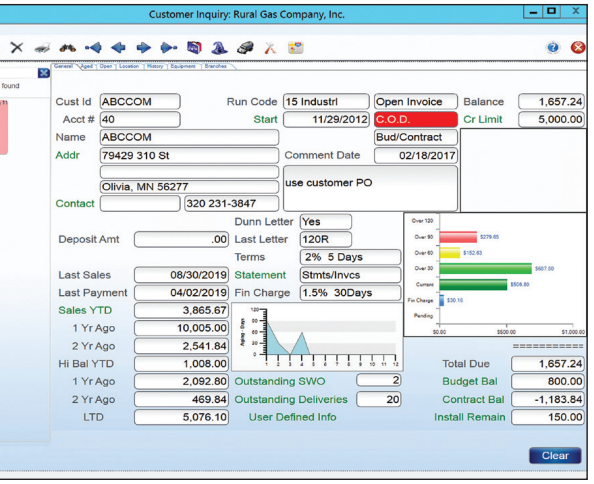
Rural Computer Consultants Inc. of Bird Island, Minn., is celebrating 40 years in business this year. A look back makes it clear that nearly every aspect of the business has changed dramatically since its early days at the end of the 1970s. What began as two brothers, Brian and Kevin Sheehan, in a small office inside the family retail propane business is now 60-employees strong and led by Brian Sheehan, his sister Susie Peterson, four of their grown children, and 54 more employees.

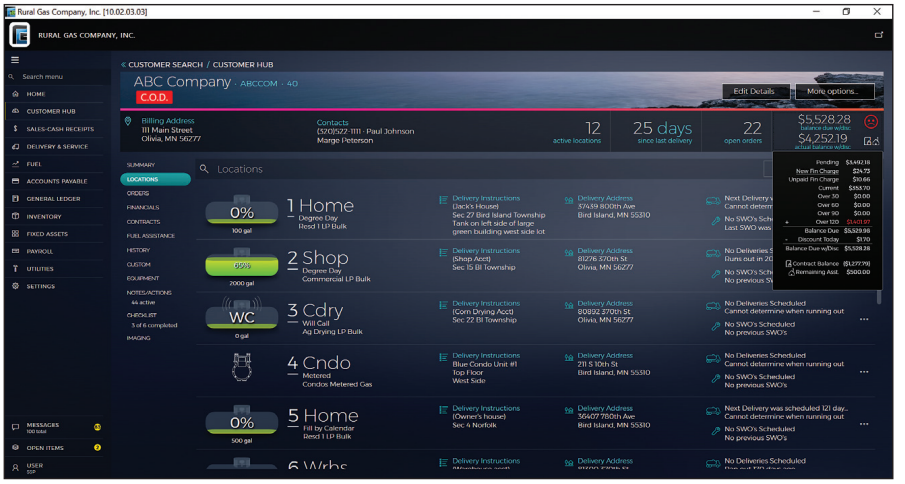
The home office, originally in Bird Island, a small town of approximately 1000 people, was moved briefly to Redwood Falls and then Willmar before returning to Bird Island near the end of its first decade of business in 1987. Currently, staff in Bird Island now totals 46, with 14 more employees based in Alabama, Montana, Mississippi, Virginia, and Maine.

Current owners Brian Sheehan and Susie Peterson spoke with ***BPN*** about the genesis and evolution of Rural Computer Consultants, or RCC, as it is known to many in the propane industry. Touted as "For Fuel People, By Fuel People," RCC's roots go back to the small, family-owned retail propane business, Sheehan's Gas, which was founded in Bird Island in 1952 by their father, Fabe Sheehan. The need for a quality software program to support the family propane business initially presented an entrepreneurial opportunity for his young sons Brian and Kevin. "One of our older brothers, Mike, was leading the family propane business at the time and sought an automated system to help run the business efficiently," Brian Sheehan explained. "Our business and programming skills were put to the test. A software program specific to a retail propane company was developed and we felt we could be successful marketing the program to other fuel companies."

"Kevin's passion for programming was found in college while he was seeking to find his niche," Peterson said. "He got a lot of programming training in college and had further honed his skills working at Control Data." With professional guidance from the Southwest Minnesota Small Business Development Center, Brian and Kevin had the confidence to market their software nationwide. Within a short time, "a lot of people wanted to see the new program that was working for Mike," Sheehan said.

"We went to the propane convention in Atlanta and stressed that our roots in propane guided our development process to be successful for our company as well as others. Our program was designed to run on a lot of machines and did well." In the early years, the program ran on Cado machines. Later, the system also ran on Altos computers, which were sometimes sold with the programs. IBM and Surface computers were also sold with the programs. From the beginning, the plan was to design and maintain a technically advanced, low-cost system that could be used nationally. "We wanted to be a company not too small to handle corporate organizations or too big to handle independent offices," Sheehan said. "At that time, being in an open, transportable Unix operating system





where we could choose our computer program made us very price competitive. This made the program and computer systems available to even the smallest companies."

"The first trade show we attended was in Atlanta in 1984," Peterson said. "The guys learned quickly about needs of other fuel companies in other parts of the country that did not run exactly as the Sheehan retail company did." Some quick adjustments were made to the software.

"Nonetheless, the guys had a lot of real world propane experience that paid off," she added. "As an example, there was a time when we were going to assign tanks to be moved in the yard by serial number. The guys quickly knew some flexibility in the computer program would be a lot better in cases where the tank needed to satisfy the serial number match was in a stack under six other heavy tanks. It was better to make a serial number change in the system."

In 1987, the company expanded its product offering when it acquired Bird Island Computer Services, a mutual insurance software marketing company. "We rewrote the software package and started marketing it to the insurance industry nationwide." In addition, their sister Susie Peterson adapted the software for use in her retail clothing stores in Bird Island and Renville. Eleven years later, in 1998, Peterson joined brothers Brian and Kevin as an owner of RCC, bringing her unique knowledge of accounting and retail to the company.

"For many years, I was a sounding board for my two brothers," Peterson explained. The three of them were the youngest of their parents' eight children, so they were especially close. "As adults, we could talk through life and business challenges. Before I was an owner in RCC, we had an agreement that if my brothers couldn't come to a decision together on something, they would walk across the street to my store and I would listen to both sides and break a tie. They would go with my decision." This happened only a very few times, according to the siblings.

Just a few years ago, Kevin Sheehan retired and sold his share of the business to his brother and sister. A fourth partner, Brian Fagerstrom, who was also an owner for several years, has since sold his share. Before the departure of Kevin Sheehan and Fagerstrom, they, along with Brian Sheehan and Peterson, were named Minnesota Small Business Persons of the Year in 2011 by the U.S. Small Business Administration. This prestigious award is given to a company that dem-



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New computer firm opened locally by Brian Sheehan

Rural Computer Consultants, a new business was launched in Bird Island this week by Brian Sheehan, 22, son of Mr. and Mrs. Fabian Sheehan of this city.

Present quarters for the new business are located in the rear of Sheehan's LP Gas Service, Inc., at 106 Main Street. Brian said he hopes to have another location for the business in Bird Island soon.

The business handles Apple computers, and specializes in programming packages for farmers, businesses, or personal use.

Working with Brian, part-time as a consultant is his older brother, Kevin Sheehan, who is employed full-time at PALS-Poultry and Livestock Service, in Willmar.

Brian, a 1976 graduate of Bird Island-Lake Lillian High School attended St. Thomas College in St. Paul for three year, majoring in engineering, and then changed his specialty to computer programming and attended Wahpeton State School of Science, Wahpeton, North Dakota, for one year.

Kevin, a 1972 graduate of Bird Island High School, attended the University of Minnesota.

BRIAN SHEEHAN launched a new business in Bird Island this week, known as Rural Computer Consultants. It is headquartered in the rear of Sheehan's LP Gas Service, Inc., at 106 Main Street. The apparatus in front of Sheehan is an Apple computer.

Brian said that although he handles only Apple computers at present, he hopes to deal in larger systems in the future.

This 1981 article features Brian Sheehan in his first office, which was a small area within the Sheehan's Gas building in Bird Island. What started with an Apple computer, two floppy drives, and a tiny monitor is now a software company with installations worldwide.



This Cado computer was the very first computer to run the RCC software. It used three 8-in. floppies.



The 1981 Altos computer with two 5-1/4-in. 760k floppies (upper left) was a three-user system with 64K of memory. It took a whole day to compile just the "Enter Sales" function for the RCC software. Also shown here are a 1983 Altos computer (lower left); a 1986 Altos 586 (lower right); and a 1986 Altos 486 Doberman computer (upper right).

onstrates growth in the number of employees or increased sales, markets innovative products, or makes a contribution to community-oriented projects.

Not long ago, the company sold the insurance software division but has continued to grow in the areas of propane, natural gas, and fueloil. With more than 1800 software installations at 1500-plus companies, many with multiple locations, the company has grown significantly through sales of the software and acquisition of other software companies including PSI, Data Control, and Fuel Pak. "We now have invested significantly to have the latest technology available to our customers," Peterson pointed out. "Certainly, a lot has changed since 1979. Email, high-speed internet, smartphones, and tablets have come about; cloud hosting is a new technology; and many more changes have occurred. It is important for a company wanting its customers to have the latest, most efficient business software to always keep up."

"The needs of the Sheehan retail propane business were one



Staff at Rural Computer Consultants' Bird Island office. Not shown here are 14 staff from other offices and employees who work remotely.



RCC is led by two generations. They include (front row, from left) Susan Sheehan-Peterson, Brian Sheehan, and Kevin Sheehan, and (back row, from left) Abby Thurston, Holly Johnson, Kyle Sheehan, and Jessica Balderston.

factor that led to new programming strategies," Peterson said. "As time went on, it was really the needs of all of our users driving future upgrades. We often sent out an email seeking input. Furthermore, we hold a user group training seminar for three to four days every year. After several days of formal training and mingling, we have a lot of valuable feedback regarding future development."

Peterson and Sheehan credit a great staff for most of RCC's growth and success. "We have such a top-notch staff in our information technology department. It is amazing and keeps us on the forefront of current technology to many more areas," Peterson said. "Our programming department works to keep our legacy programs running for customers who have not moved to our new version and works tirelessly on the rewrite to our new v10 product."

According to Peterson, the administrative and sales departments work together well to handle existing and new accounts to RCC. "The MOGO [Mobile Office on the Go] and fuel support departments put in very long hours assisting customers, training customers and supporting them," she added. "If a customer has something difficult going on, that could mean our staff helps them at some unusual times of the day and night. Our father grew his business with a focus on service and support and it is truly how we have grown ours."

Growth for a successful software company in a small town does have its challenges. "Fortunately, little Bird Island has three fiber internet sources," Sheehan said. "That is unprecedented for such a small town, but it has been wonderful for us. The technology has allowed us to keep our business here." In 2010, with a downward trend in the economy, the timing was good for RCC to expand and renovate the St. Mary's Convent that the company had moved into. "Interest rates were lower and construction costs were down. We put some people to work. Fifty years after the foundation was laid for the convent, we were renovating and expanding to accommodate our rapid growth."

Recently Sheehan accepted a large role as second vice president of the International Lions Club. "This has him traveling much more all over the world. We are so excited for Brian," said Peterson. "It is a seven-year commitment. He will go through all of the offices including president." Sheehan, who has already been to South Africa, Bosnia, China, and Zambia in this role, said he looks forward to the heavier travel and Lions Club activities. He feels confident in his sister as well as the next generation and many other employees who handle the day-to-day work of leading RCC.

While the technology and growth have changed RCC dramatically, the basic goals of the company have largely remained the same: to create, maintain, and enhance software that is quality, affordable, complete, and, wherever feasible, self-supporting. Sheehan said, "We will continue to provide the highest quality support for all customers." ■

TRUCK SAFETY: BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE SALE

PAT THORNTON

Photo courtesy of Jason Soulon/Westmor

Amid the process of building, selling, and servicing propane trucks of all kinds, there is a group of professionals who dutifully go about their work every day to make sure the roads will be safe as thousands of propane trucks go out to take care of customers' needs. "This past winter was rough and the people who keep everything rolling really need to be recognized," said Tim Schweppe, general manager—propane division at Arrow Tank and Engineering (Cambridge, Minn.), "I will start with my better half (in the workplace), Kelly Schlickenmayer, our production manager, and his crew. He is the 'absolute No. 1 premier' production manager and a lifeline to so many people in the industry who have relied on him to carry out their day for the past 25-plus years."



Jason Soulon cautions that drivers should not leave the emergency shutoff in the open position to save a step at delivery.

"Kelly needs to balance our new production schedule for new bobtails, DOT/ASME documentation, requalification, forecast inventory, and, most importantly, conduct random repairs and field calls and help during the day," Schweppe said. "This is an extremely tall order… I can only imagine he does this for his absolute passion and love for his work and the industry. He is a very essential ingredient to the industry—not just Arrow."

"Safety starts with the employee, the hands-

on people," Schlickenmayer explained. "I can give the training and resources, but the knowledge and confidence the employee brings is what builds the value in a safe bobtail. Safety is a must and always a top priority in our industry." For the customer, he believes knowledge is a must to ensure a bobtail is managed safely. "Knowing the standard operating procedures; testing the CTMV emergency shutdown system; meter creep testing; understanding the gauges and valves; inspecting the delivery hose for cuts or abrasions; and being aware of the area they work in are all critical to daily safety," he said. "I haven't seen many in our industry cut corners over my 25 years of experience…only some unauthorized shops and a few do-it-yourselfers."

Schweppe also gave high marks to a new employee at Arrow Tank and Engineering, Nate Jacobsen, who serves as production manager for its new transport trailer business. "We started this division in January of this year," Jacobsen said. "There is a lot of hands-on training for staff. New employees must learn what every valve does. They must know what is in every tank that comes into the facility and the associated safety concerns." His memories of starting in a manufacturing plant, learning the ropes, and moving into management are as fresh as when he began his first job in 2007. "There is always a lot to do, but a mind-set of always following safety procedures is very important. In a given week, tasks include talking with customers, finding work, doing estimates, ordering parts, and training guys to build and fix the trucks." In his first year, Jacobsen already has new customers in several states, including Texas, Oregon, Nebraska, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Georgia.

Regarding safety precautions for drivers, Jacobsen recommends regular maintenance and not putting it off until tomorrow. "Tomorrow and next week never come. Cleaning a transport truck, washing the road salt and grime off equipment, is important and should be done regularly."

At Bulk Truck and Transport Service Inc. (Hanover, Ind.), Jason Wilson, the company's service manager, grew up in the retail propane business before getting into truck building. "One of the most important challenges is troubleshooting the pumping system with a customer over the phone and walking the customer through repairs in a safe manner," Wilson said. "In the production process, we perform redundant check sheets in each department, and we also perform live tests to assure all components are installed per manufacturer's recommendations and are functioning as designed." Wilson suggests that customers familiarize themselves with requirements set forth by DOT in 49 CFR Part 180 and follow them monthly.

CEO John Hawkins of H&H Sales (Huntertown, Ind.) has nearly 50 years of industry experience specializing in crane service trucks, cylinder delivery trucks, and propane storage cabinets for forklift and 20-lb grill cylinders. "We do a complete walk-around with customers and go through the owner's manual with them. We point out all PTO warning valves. Customers can always reach us by phone if necessary," Hawkins said. "With cranes and tanks onboard, operators need to always be aware of how full the tank is and the radius of unobstructed area. Crane trucks should always be operated on a level surface. They need to be aware of electrical lines." Another area



John Hawkins of H&H Sales



Tim Schweppe of Arrow Tank and Engineering



Kelly Schlickenmayer of Arrow Tank and Engineering



Nate Jacobsen of Arrow Tank and Engineering



Jason Soulon
of Westmor



Jason Wilson
of Bulk Truck and
Transport Service



Steve Bloomstrand
of Rocket Supply

of concern is transporting tanks and cylinders, according to Hawkins. “Securing the cylinders and tanks is very important. Running a strap is often necessary to secure them. The straps should be checked regularly for fraying, cuts, or abrasions.”

Other areas noted by Hawkins include inspecting for PTO leakage, watching speed based on the load being carried, checking every two months to make sure U-bolts are tight, and replacing lights that go out.

“Having heavily experienced, trained personnel…a mature, experienced staff is very key to our success,” said Steve Bloomstrand, who has been with Rocket Supply (Roberts, Ill.) for 25 years and is its sales and marketing manager. “For the customer, the daily inspection is extremely important. We feel a very high percentage of our customers take safety very seriously. Being familiar with the vehicle will help you notice when something has changed that ought to be looked at further. It’s important to be cognizant of anything out of the ordinary while performing the daily inspections and to pay attention during pumping to any irregularities in performance or sound.” Bloomstrand notes that many new features such as rear-vision cameras and improved LED lighting are helping to further enhance safety. “The industry is doing a good job,” he added.

“Conducting regular safety meetings and holding everyone accountable for safety are important steps to make sure it is always a priority,” said Jason Soulon, branch manager at Westmor (Shawnee, Kan.). He explained regular meetings include stretch exercises at the beginning of each shift, as well as discussions of safety and production concerns for that day. “We have a safety coordinator at each facility,” Soulon said. “It is a key function for at least one employee at each of our locations. Employees know that they can raise concerns at any time through our ‘care to share’ process. They can document any safety concern from something as small as an air hose having a bubble to making suggestions for improving an entire production process.”

“Protection and restraint from falls is very important in the truck building process,” Soulon said, noting the OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) requirements. “In designing a safe vehicle, weight scale and weight distribution analysis are important. When we order a chassis, we want to understand the jurisdiction the vehicle will operate in. As an example, New England weight laws are much different than those in the Midwest.” In addition, Soulon and his team take into account any safety features the customer wants, such as safety-interlock devices to prevent pull-aways at loading racks; camera systems for backing up, including 360 degree camera systems and obstacle detection systems; and roll stability systems. “Electronic stability control minimizes the risk of rollover and may someday be mandatory on tank vehicles.”

For customers, Soulon also stressed problems that regular inspections can help resolve. “Tank corrosion is a problem that can lead to more and more expensive repair costs if not resolved when first detected. The spread of corrosion to tank rails and tank rail pads can add $2000 or more to the cost of refurbishing a bobtail.” He also recommends washing the bobtail at least weekly, not only for better maintenance, but to maintain a good brand image.

Soulon noted a few pet peeves regarding how some drivers operate their bobtails. “Drivers sometimes leave the emergency shutoff in open position to save a step at every delivery. This can cause it to freeze in the open position and not allow the emergency shutoff device to function when it is needed. Another concern relates to the filling of cylinders from the bobtail. With bobtails typically able to fill tanks at 60 gallons per minute, it is best to fill cylinders using a bypass valve that can vary the flow rate, such as the Versa-Fill bypass valve from Marshall Excelsior. The sale of more and more cylinders is making this a bigger issue.” Soulon also encouraged the use of Ergoload decks, which are designed to make it easier to load bobtails. “It puts a lot less strain on the driver’s back. This makes a difference over time.” ■

TIPS FOR MANAGING SAFETY, LIABILITY

STEVE RELYEA

Companies that provide insurance can also provide resources to help those they insure prevent accidents in the first place. Since they learn about accidents soon after they happen, they are well placed to discover how the accidents happen and then share that knowledge with others.

Propane marketers have access to many other resources, too. "This industry is heavily regulated; it has great resources available from the associations and other groups," says Lauren Fronczek, senior marketing manager at National Interstate Insurance Co.* "Propane marketers understand the liability, so they have safety standards in place."

"The barrier to entry is high," adds Michael Winchell, director of specialty transportation at National Interstate Insurance Co. "You can't just buy a truck and go into business, as you can in many other industries."

One of the available resources is the industry's Certified Employee Training Program (CETP). "Since CETP came in, we have seen a real decline in losses for general liability," says Frank Thompson, owner of PT Risk Management (Phoenix). "Out of the last 16 explosions and fires we've seen, not one has been our client's fault."

Propane marketers have shown that they use these resources and follow safe practices, and it's important that they remain vigilant in doing so.

"While the number of accidents may not be increasing, the size of jury verdicts most definitely is," says Todd Buechler, assistant vice president, risk engineering at Crum & Forster (Geneseo, Ill.). "Therefore, it is imperative companies be more diligent in implementing sound business practices, following required codes, evaluating all parts of the business to determine compliance, and doing whatever possible to reduce accidents."

To that end, these insurance experts shared with ***BPN*** several tips for managing safety and liability.

PERFORM INTERNAL AUDITS. "One of the best means to prevent accidents and comply with standards is to perform internal audits," Buechler says. "Periodically you may get audited by your insurance company or some other entity such as the federal DOT or OSHA. These audits are valuable because of the outside perspective they offer, but, frankly, you don't want to wait for these audits to find the weak areas in your operation. Companies who tend to be proactive in auditing their own operation tend to have far less compliance and safety deficiencies, which can reduce your risk of accidents."

SEE WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FROM YOUR BROKER. "We advise marketers to work closely with their brokers," says Fronczek. "Use the resources provided by the insurance carrier; there are a lot of tools out there that not everyone takes advantage of." Examples include prepackaged safety meetings and defensive driving programs. "Some insurance companies may cover the cost of a defensive driving program," Winchell adds. "Propane marketers know the risk better than anyone, but a defensive driving program can help reduce the frequency of auto accidents with simple procedures drivers can follow."

TRAIN EMPLOYEES. "Training can play a large part in how claims are handled. When a matter goes into litigation, employee training will be scrutinized," Buechler says. "Should a loss occur, plaintiff's attorneys are going to address the level of training and education for the company as well as any employee involved in the accident," Buechler says. "We encourage propane companies to evaluate their training programs to ensure all employees participate in training, including owners, managers, and CSRs."

BE VIGILANT ABOUT REMEDIAL TRAINING, DOCUMENTATION, AND INSPECTIONS OF NEW PROPERTIES. One of the most severe losses propane marketers suffer is an explosion. These are rare, but when they do happen, it is usually due to cutting corners. "That's why remedial training is so important," says Fronczek. "Someone who has been there 20 years may get complacent. It's also important to have documentation of the condition of vehicles and drivers; you have to have it all documented in order to manage it." Winchell adds, "If you are going to service a new property, inspect it to make sure the system is in working order."

REDUCE VEHICLE ACCIDENTS WITH GOOD HIRING, TRAINING, AND OVERSIGHT. "One of the growing concerns throughout the insurance industry is the increased costs of vehicle accidents, which can be attributed to many factors, but distracted driving is likely the major cause," Buechler says. Companies can manage their auto exposure by hiring qualified drivers, obtaining background checks, training drivers, managing driver activities through technology (i.e., collision avoidance, GPS telematics, and cameras), investigating root causes of accidents, disciplining appropriately, and retraining when necessary.

TAKE MEASURES TO PREVENT SLIPS AND FALLS. Some of the most frequent losses for propane marketers are workers' compensation claims resulting from injuries suffered when pulling hoses or exiting a vehicle. "That is not increasing, but it is the top frequency," Winchell reports. "People are devoting more money and resources to prevent these." Examples of preventative measures include providing shoes with proper grips on them; extra steps on trucks, so there is not so far to fall; an extra handle, so there are three points of contact as the driver is exiting the truck; and good mechanics as far as pulling hoses and entering and exiting the truck. "We also support physical abilities testing to be used before hiring."

DEVELOP A RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAM. For those employees who do end up having a workers' compensation claim, be prepared with a return-to-work program. "If you do have a claim, you can help them get back to work with light-duty tasks," Fronczek explains. "If you don't have a program like that, it is harder for them to get back to work."

ENSURE PROPANE INSTALLATIONS MEET LOCAL CODES. "One of the greatest challenges in defending propane marketers after a propane fire and/or explosion is trying to overcome installation code violations," Buechler reports. "When there is no clear evidence as to the cause, especially when the homeowners are deceased or severely injured, the plaintiffs will point to all of the installation code violations. The way to reduce liability potential is to install and maintain equipment per codes and manufacturer recommendations. One suggestion is to provide a more detailed checklist which may help the service technician meet the installation requirements."

KEEP GOOD DOCUMENTATION. "Documentation tells the story. It's a complete reflection of the marketer and how they will be viewed by a jury during the trial," Buechler says. He states Crum & Forster encourages all companies to take a thorough look at their documentation procedures and audit the completion of forms. He also notes that it's becoming more commonplace to take pictures of installations, along with warning tags, and how propane containers are secured when necessary.

SAVE ALL YOUR CYLINDER REQUALIFICATION DOCUMENTATION. Though the law says requalification facilities need only keep cylinder requalification reports for five years, Thompson recommends keeping them forever. He suggests scanning the records into your computer system and keeping them. "If you certify a bottle and then a claim comes up downstream, that documentation is the starting point to help us protect you."

FOLLOW COMPANY POLICIES. When an accident occurs, attorneys on both sides will ask what the company policy is and how it was implemented leading up to the accident. "On occasion, company policies go above and beyond codes and the company will be held to that standard," Buechler says. "Therefore, implement sound company policies and follow them, whether verbal or written. Policies can change or become outdated, so policies need to be reviewed periodically, modified when necessary and communicated to all employees. Make sure the communication is documented."

REVIEW INSURANCE COVERAGE. "We obviously recommend choosing a carrier with propane-specific expertise in underwriting, claims, and risk engineering," Buechler says. "The client should annually review coverage with their agents to adjust for changes during the policy year. There appears to be an increase in claim activity for employment practices and cyber liability; propane marketers should be looking for coverage to address these types of claims. With the increase of wildfire occurrences, propane marketers should review their insurance policies to ensure they have adequate coverage to protect their assets. One company asset that tends to be overlooked is a company-owned tank at a customer's site."

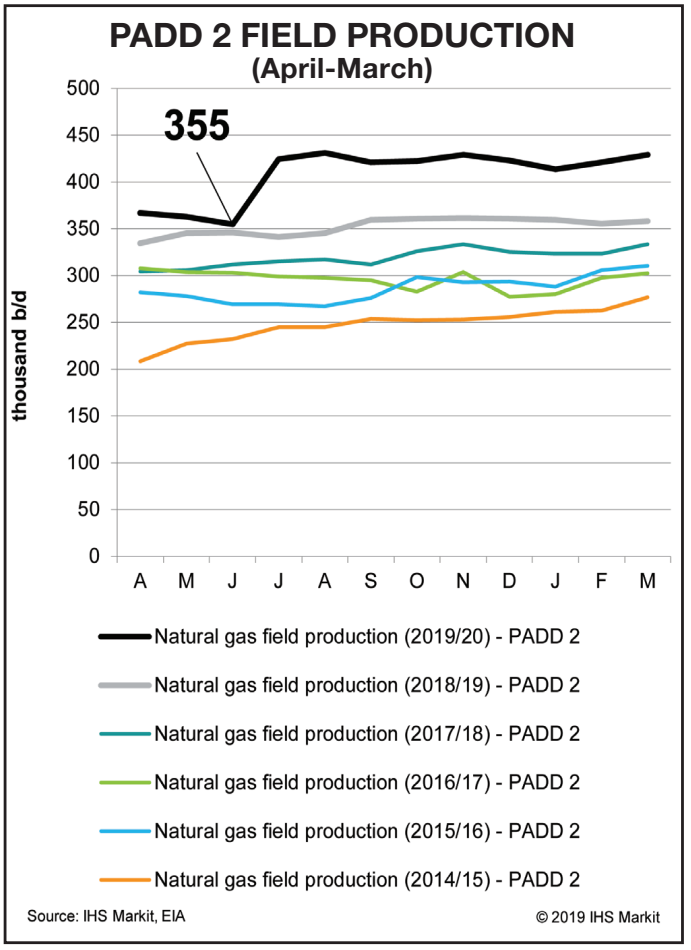
ASK AN EXPERT IF YOUR COVERAGE IS SUFFICIENT. With insurers suffering rising losses from forest fires, tornados, and flooding, and with the price of steel up, propane marketers who haven't increased coverage on their tanks may be underinsured, Thompson says. One insurance company is automatically increasing customers' coverage 4% a year because of that. To see if your coverage is sufficient, he recommends working with an agent who understands the industry and its needs. "We know what's going on because propane is what we do," Thompson says. "An agent who is a generalist and writes only one or two propane accounts, doesn't know the cost of steel and doesn't know the propane business."

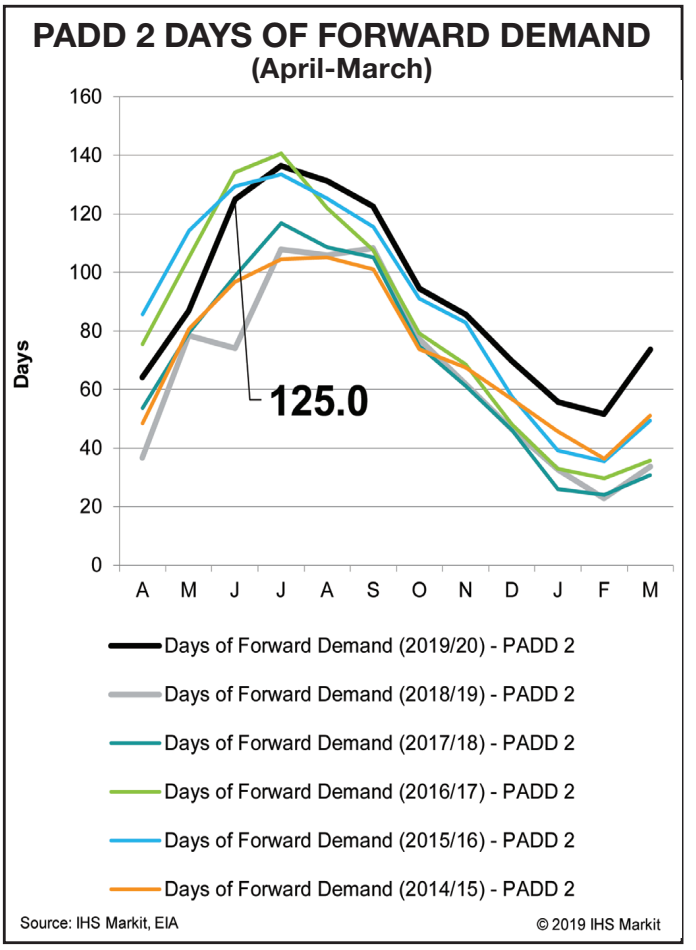
CONSIDER CYBER LIABILITY COVERAGE AND UMBRELLA POLICIES. "Cyber liability coverage is very important," says Fronczek. "We've all seen the problems big corporations are having with cyberattacks; companies of all sizes are now picking up coverage for that too." There's also a growing interest in umbrella policies, Winchell adds. "Liability throughout the transportation industry is more litigious," he explains. "More and more marketers are buying an umbrella policy to protect their business. It's not just propane; all transportation businesses are seeing higher verdicts. It's important to make sure you have appropriate limits."

BEWARE OF INSURANCE CARRIERS WITH PRICES THAT ARE FAR BELOW THE COMPETITION. "There is a fair price for insurance, just as there is a fair price for propane," Thompson says. He has seen two things happen with companies that offered unrealistic rates: they raised their rates dramatically the first time the customer renews or they stop offering coverage for the propane industry. Two companies recently ended their programs for the propane industry, he reports. Both were known for offering coverage at very low rates. Their departure left hundreds of marketers looking for a new provider. Another tactic is to offer a low initial rate and then raise the rate dramatically upon renewal. "We've seen the cheapest carriers raise their rates 36% to 40% the second year," Thompson reports. "Rates will go up with any carrier, but they should not spike; they should go up gradually."

ASK IF THE INSURANCE CARRIER YOU ARE CONSIDERING PROVIDES A CAUSE-AND-ORIGIN SPECIALIST IN CASE OF AN INCIDENT. Not all do, but it's important. On Labor Day weekend, Thompson got a call from an employee. A general store had been destroyed by a fire, and his client provided the propane the company sold from the front of the store. Thompson called the insurance carrier and found they were already sending an attorney and an inspector to the scene. They found that a security camera at a convenience store across the street from the general store had captured footage of an arsonist starting the fire. "The fire inspector and the police inspector had a photo and a suspect; we were free and clear," Thompson says. "That's what we need—a cause-and-origin specialist there immediately to protect the propane company." ■

*Policies are underwritten by National Interstate Insurance Co. and Vanliner Insurance Co., authorized insurers in all 50 states and the D.C.; National Interstate Insurance Co. of Hawaii Inc., an authorized insurer in Hawaii, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio; and Triumphe Casualty Co., an authorized insurer in all 50 states and the D.C. except in Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Wyoming. National Interstate Insurance Co., 3250 Interstate Drive, Richfield, OH 44286. All rights reserved.





SUPPLY UPDATE: A WELL-SUPPLIED SITUATION

STEVE RELYEA

Heading into winter, the industry is in a well-supplied situation. The recent attacks on Saudi oil facilities had no long-term effect and the current supply situation in the U.S. and in each PADD is within recent norms.

So said Darryl Rogers, vice president, midstream oil and NGL at IHS Markit, who presented a U.S. Propane Market Outlook Sept. 29 during the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) 2019 fall board of directors meetings.

Rogers delivered his presentation 15 days after the Sept. 14 attacks in Saudi Arabia. In it, he looked at the Saudi oil situation and its implications to U.S. propane. He also displayed a history and forecast of five factors that affect the U.S. propane market.

NO LONG-TERM EFFECTS

The Sept. 14 attacks targeted Abqaiq, the world's largest oil processing facility, and Khurais, Saudi Arabia's second largest oil field. The initial production loss at the two facilities was 5.7 MMbbld. Abqaiq had a processing capacity of 6 MMbbld to 7 MMbbld and was operating at a rate of 4.5 MMbbld before the attacks. Khurais had a capacity of 1.5 MMbbld and was operating at a rate of 1.2 MMbbld before the attacks.

At the time of Rogers' presentation, repairs were underway and official estimates were that there would be no reduction of flows of crude to customers.

"Unlike past disruptions, there are now significant supplies and reserves, and a different economic situation," Rogers told those attending the meeting of NPGA's propane supply and logistics committee.

The impact to NGL production, based on crude oil wellhead production and IHS Markit's assessment of the impacted facilities and overall capabilities, was expected to be a loss of 305,000 bbld in September and possibly 208,000 bbld in October depending on the expected timing of a full recovery. The October NGL production impact could be even lower if production ramps up from other supply sources within Saudi Arabia.

"From an NGL perspective, the Saudis say they will ramp up production outside the affected areas," Rogers explained.

Other production streams/facilities and inventory draws have been offsetting production losses and working toward meeting all export obligations.

In the days immediately after the attacks, Brent oil spiked, as did Mont Belvieu, Middle East, and Far East propane to Brent price ratio. However, the propane market is global, and the Mont Belvieu price after the attacks has been less affected because there are other market factors applying downward pressure on prices. These U.S. market factors include ample storage and U.S. LPG capacity constraints.

Summing up, Rogers said, "How will this affect the price in the U.S.? Overall, there will be some small changes, but nothing long term."

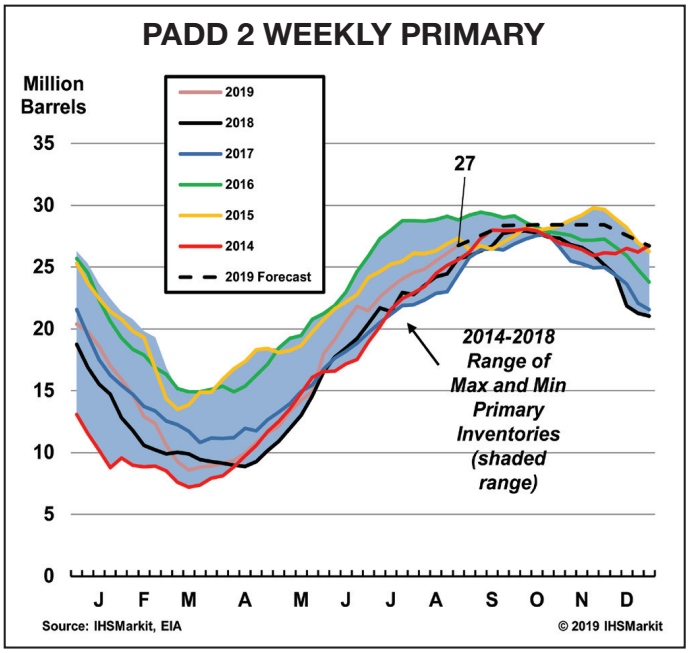
A WELL-SUPPLIED SITUATION

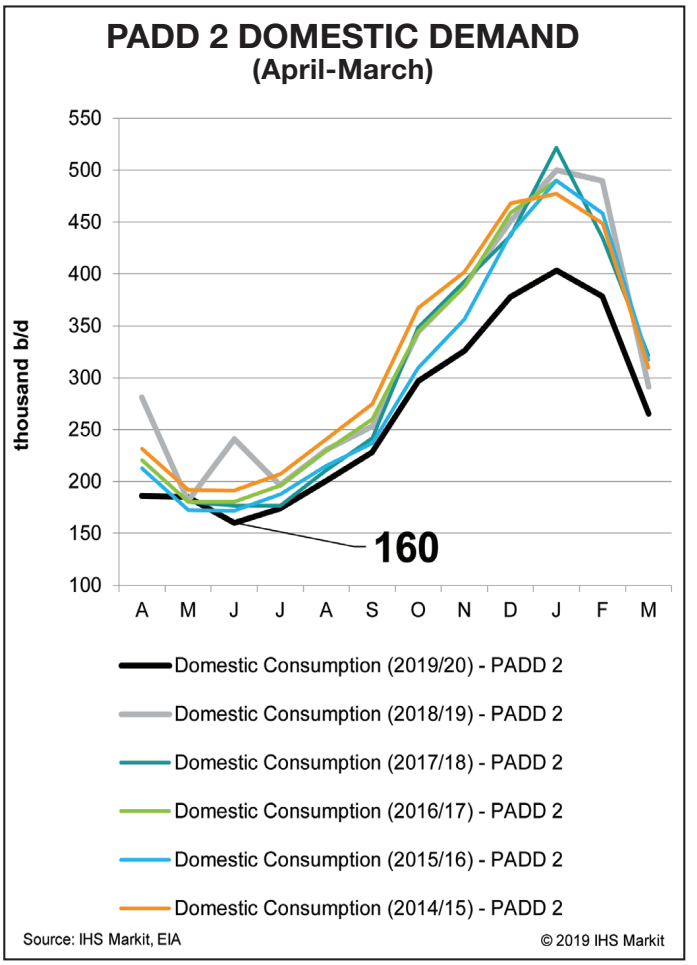
In the second half of his presentation, Rogers looked at the history and forecast for five factors that affect the U.S. propane market: absolute inventory, days of forward demand, field production, domestic demand, and exports. These data were given for the U.S. as a whole and for each of the five PADDs.

In a series of slides, Rogers presented graphs showing the historical data from 2014 through the present as well as forecast data through March 2020.

"We are in a well-supplied situation through 2020, but there are some pockets we need to watch," Rogers said. "The U.S. is well supplied, but the PADD level could deviate."

The areas of possible concern are in PADD 2, the Midwest. There, days of forward demand seems well supplied, but in certain scenarios could be lower than expected. Should that be the case, though, it would not be significantly lower than what has been seen historically, Rogers explained. In addition, PADD 2 field production expectation is relatively high, but if it's not, inventory will be lower than expected.





"That is the only PADD with a higher level of uncertainty as we look from today through the current inventory cycle ending in March 2020," Rogers said. "It is the only PADD with a slight risk, when we compare today to history."

The only other forecast that is different from what has been seen in recent years is in PADD 1, the East Coast. There, the days of forward demand is higher than normal. "PADD 1 is extremely oversupplied," Rogers noted.

"The other PADDs are within historical trends; we don't see any anomalies," he concluded.

MORE GRANULAR DATA

The breakdown by PADD was a first for the supply updates presented by representatives of IHS Markit at NPGA board of directors meetings; previous presentations gave figures for the U.S. as a whole. This offering of more granular data is meant to help provide members of the industry with the level of detail that matters to them.

Rogers welcomes feedback on this and other aspects of the supply updates provided to NPGA members by IHS Markit: "We want to hear from members what information they need to be prepared for uncertainty at the PADD level."

Rogers can be contacted at *darryl.rogers@ihsmarkit.com*. He also invites ***BPN*** readers to email him to receive a free brochure and sample report from IHS Markit's U.S. NGL Markets Weekly service. The report includes market analysis, supply, demand, and pricing information. For more information about IHS Markit, visit *ihsmarkit.com*. ■

INCOMING NPGA HEAD BRINGS EXPERIENCE IN TURNAROUND RESULTS

STEVE RELYEA

When Stephen T. (Steve) Kaminski became CEO of the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC), the organization was facing a number of challenges. Its finances were deep in the red, the number of calls its members were receiving was in steep decline, and several of the poison control centers it represented had closed due to federal and state funding cuts. During Kaminski's five years with the group, those trends were reversed. As he prepares to leave the group for a new position, AAPCC's finances are healthily in the black, call volume has increased for the first time since 2009, and not a single additional center closed—the longest stretch in the association's 60-plus-year history.

Kaminski's new position is in the propane industry. In September, the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) announced that he would be its new president and CEO.

"I look forward to getting started," he told ***BPN*** on Oct. 10. "I bring a lot of drive to the table and I am very results-oriented." Kaminski spoke with ***BPN*** after being formally introduced at the Oct. 1 NPGA fall board of directors meeting and before beginning his service to the propane industry on Oct. 28.

He brings to NPGA nine years' experience in association management in addition to more than a decade of previous experience in law and business strategy. Before that, he earned degrees in chemical engineering and law.



LEGAL, BUSINESS EXPERIENCE

Kaminski earned his bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from The Johns Hopkins University in 1997. For that degree, his studies included fluid mechanics, thermodynamics, and heat transfer, and he conducted research in the field of chemical surfactants. During his college years, he also worked in a plastic injection molding plant, conducted public policy research in the field of alternative-fueled vehicles for the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and had an engineering internship with NASA.

He earned his law degree from Harvard Law School in 2000. Kaminski then served as a clerk at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, which is one step below the U.S. Supreme Court. For the next four years, Kaminski was an attorney at a global law firm. There, he handled a mix of regulatory work, patent law, and corporate law, including on behalf of clients in the chemical and pharmaceutical industries and professional sports leagues such as the NFL.

He then transitioned from legal work to business strategy work by joining Discovery Communications, the media company that owns dozens of cable channels. Kaminski served as a director

from 2005 to 2007 and as a vice president from 2007 to 2011. "I was there when new technologies like video on demand, high-definition, and streaming came into play," he notes. Working in the company's distribution group, he negotiated deals with cable and satellite companies during that time of change.

ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT

Kaminski's first experience with association work came when he was offered a prominent position with the American Humane Association, the 501(c)(3) non-profit organization committed to ensuring the safety, welfare, and well-being of animals. As executive vice president, he largely oversaw all the group's operations and programs. "The president was a terrific fundraiser and mentor, while I minded the bread-and-butter of the $20-million organization," he explains.

American Humane's successes during his tenure included revamping two of the group's main programs: No Animals Were Harmed, which monitors the care of animals in filmed media production, and American Humane Certified, which monitors the care of farm animals. Kaminski grew the latter's certification program tenfold.

Kaminski was also vital to turning around the organization's finances. He did this in part by growing the farm program and in part by transitioning a money-losing portfolio of programs from American Humane to two universities with no loss of jobs. "At the time I joined, the association was losing $11 million a year; by the time I left, it had surpluses," Kaminski said.

In 2014, he moved to his position as CEO of AAPCC, the national association representing poison control centers that provide medical advice via the national Poison Help hotline. (Kaminski says the relationship between AAPCC and these centers is akin to that between NPGA and the state associations.) Those call centers manage an average of 8000 calls per day.

AAPCC provides its members with services such as federal advocacy; regulatory leadership; communications and promotion of the hotline; national education campaigns; accreditation and certification programs; conference hosting; and data collection and utilization. Among the topics Kaminski worked on were the opioids crisis, e-cigarettes, laundry detergent packets, the Zika virus, the Ebola virus, marijuana, energy drinks, CBD oils, and suicide prevention. (A quarter-million of the calls received each year involve suspected suicide attempts.)

As he did in his previous position, Kaminski led a financial turnaround at AAPCC. When he joined, the group was losing approximately $1.5 million on a $4.5-million budget; now it has a surplus of over $1 million each year. In addition, during his time as CEO, through significant advocacy efforts, the federal funding received by the group's membership increased from $18 million annually to $24 million and Kaminski secured a five-year, $158 million reauthorization of the Poison Center Network Act, which directly benefits AAPCC's members.

Another challenge for AAPCC was a decline in call volume as inquiries went instead to the internet. As a result, poison control centers had been steadily closing their doors due to a lack of funding since the 1990s, including six centers closing in the five years before Kaminski began. He led a turnaround here too. In his five years with AAPCC, not a single center closed down. Today, the call volume is rising for the first time since 2009.

Kaminski accomplished this turnaround with a comprehensive strategy that included an increased emphasis on promotion and media outreach. Before he began this effort, 2000 articles a year mentioned the hotline; now, 5000 articles a year mention it. The popular Radiolab podcast did a full show about Poison Control and the hotline. The Department of Defense made certain the hotline number is in every military base. AAPCC collaborated with Johnson & Johnson and the publisher Scholastic on a campaign in schools that taught children how to read medicine labels and how to call the hotline. An AAPCC marketing campaign, Text-To-Save, promoted a function in which people could text a number and that would save the hotline number to their cellphone.

He also worked with makers of digital assistants: "It used to be that when you would ask Siri, Alexa, or Google to call poison control, they would give you all kinds of numbers; now they give you the national Poison Help hotline."

Another program that earned media coverage for AAPCC was its campaign to warn parents about the dangers of children swallowing laundry detergent packets. These packets are colorful and, to a child, can look like candy. It was AAPCC's data from calls to the poison control centers that brought this problem to the attention of the media and the public. The group worked with manufacturers of the packets on safety measures, which include voluntary standards to modify the locking mechanism on the packaging and addition of a bittering agent to the packets.

DANGERS OF LAUNDRY PACKETS

"But it was the Tide Pod Challenge that really garnered media attention," Kaminski said, referring to the phenomenon in which teens would film themselves eating the packets and then post the video online. "That was only a couple dozen teenagers, but we used it to raise the profile of the dangers of these packets so that parents of toddlers would store the packets properly. I was interviewed by many major media outlets and AAPCC had 3 billion media impressions from the outreach."

Today, the market share of laundry detergent packets continues to increase, at the expense of bottled laundry detergent, but the number of poisonings involving the packets has gone down significantly.

As he was preparing to transition to leadership of NPGA, Kaminski said that as he learns about the propane industry, he sees an opportunity for promotion and media outreach here, too.

"There is a lot that can be done around propane to promote it as the linchpin of a clean energy solution that will benefit all Americans," he says. "There is an opportunity for turnaround messaging here. Driving consumer sentiment to view propane as a clean fuel will influence policymakers at all levels."

On a personal level, Kaminski has a number of passions. He's the author of four published mystery novels; is a cofounder of a small company in the men's health space (which no longer requires any of his professional time commitment); has played soccer his entire life, including in college; likes cooking with his 13-year-old daughter, Maya; and enjoys traveling with his partner, Kristin. ■

NPGA LEADERS RALLY INDUSTRY DURING FALL MEETINGS

STEVE RELYEA

The propane industry faces a clear and present danger from those who want to ban the use of fossil fuels, but it also has an opportunity to grow by positioning propane as a source of clean energy. Members of the industry can make a difference by becoming advocates and teaching the people around them about the many benefits of this abundant, affordable, domestic fuel.

Those messages were heard throughout the NPGA fall board of directors meeting and related committee meetings held Sept. 29 through Oct. 1. Among those rallying the industry were the association's chairman, its current president and CEO, and his successor, who is scheduled to take the helm Oct. 28. They each addressed participants at the Oct. 1 board of directors meeting.

First up was Randy Thompson, chairman of NPGA and a founder and senior advisor at ThompsonGas LLC. He said the pervasive messages that propane is a fossil fuel and that all fossil fuels should be eliminated are a clear and present danger. He added that "electrify everything" is unrealistic, and those who want to eliminate fossil fuels are uninformed.

"We need to deliver a cohesive and unified message to our many constituents," he said.

He explained that the industry needs to promote that propane is the cleanest fuel available to combat environmental issues; that there is more propane in the U.S. than anywhere else; and that propane is the best engine fuel available right here and now. Thompson referred to his previously announced goal of growing the industry by 4 billion gallons in five years and said the goal is achievable.

"There is fear of putting this kind of goal in front of us. But it is measurable; it is actionable; and it is realistic. It holds leaders accountable," he said. "This is what I refer to as vision casting. But the real key to exponential growth is execution of the plan."

When Thompson took the helm of ThompsonGas, it operated one location with 1.2 million gallons and eight employ-



Incoming NPGA president and CEO Stephen Kaminski (at podium) addressed the fall board of directors meeting. Scheduled to take the helm Oct. 28, he said, "We have challenges and we need to be aggressive."

ees. Now the company employs 800-plus people and operates in 20 states with 100 locations selling more than 100 million gallons.

In order to achieve his 4-billion-gallon growth challenge, Thompson believes the industry needs to gain control of the narrative and differentiate propane from other fuel sources. He concluded, "We must meet fossil fuel opposition with a good dose of education and robust public relations outreach."

"A FUTURE OF GROWTH"

Next, Rick Roldan delivered the president's report. Roldan is transitioning out of his position after 25 years with the association and 18 years as its president and CEO. "In my last report as president, I want to share some words to my successor," he began. "We have spent two days talking about the headwinds facing this industry; I want to talk about the opportunities."

Roldan noted that the propane industry has been around for 106 years and has proven to be adaptive. He pointed out that propane was first used for home lighting, was then used to fuel airships, and then became widely used for home heating and home cooking. Today, he added, its applications are expanding from burner tips to fuel injectors.

"This is a fantastic product," he said. "It is clean, green, and American-made. It is part of what moved this country to energy dominance."

Addressing his successor, Roldan concluded, "The people employed in this industry are the best that America has to offer. They have deep roots in their communities. They are willing to engage any time you ask them to. You are not alone. You will lead us to a future of growth and opportunity."

In a special presentation following the president's report, Thompson returned to the podium and announced that a scholarship would be awarded and named in Roldan's honor, in perpetuity. The scholarship is already funded, and Roldan is invited to be involved in it.

"HOME RUN SWINGS"

The incoming president and CEO of NPGA, Stephen Kaminski, was then introduced. His appointment had been announced in a press release a week earlier. In the days preceding the Oct. 1 board of directors meeting, he had sat in on the related committee meetings, listening to the discussions and asking questions.

After being formally introduced at the board of directors meeting, Kaminski noted that he has degrees in chemical engineering and law and that his background includes federal and state advocacy; regulations; working on codes and standards; managing associations; communications; operations; and developing new programs and tools for members.

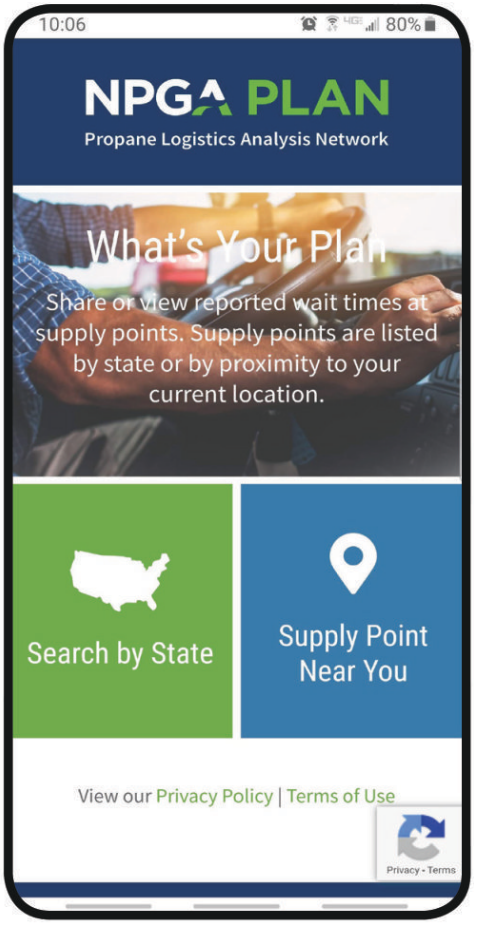
"I am particularly proud of providing leadership in turnaround conditions in industries I work for," he said. Noting that he is new to propane, Kaminski said he will be asking a lot of questions. He said he will have a change mentality and a growth mentality and looks forward to hearing members' thoughts on his suggestions. He also said that throughout his career he has had a history of not only playing defense, but also playing offense.

"We have challenges and we need to be aggressive," Kaminski concluded. "We need to take home run swings if we are going to win. We need to recognize the role propane plays in providing green energy for all Americans. I am humbled by your faith in me and I look forward to serving all of you and driving home the success this industry needs. Collectively, we can take propane where we need to go. I am excited by what we will accomplish."

THREE NEW TOOLS ANNOUNCED

In other news, during meetings held over the three-day event, NPGA staff made presentations about three new tools that have recently been introduced.

PropanePAC website: Here, NPGA members can learn about the association's political action committee (PAC), the candidates it supports, and the reasons it supports them. "We need to make sure our members who are not at these committee meetings can become involved, so we need to take the PAC to them," Peter Ferrell, director, political and industry affairs, said. "This new tool will help us share the PAC's goals and why we need these essential personal contributions." The PropanePAC website is at *npga.org/organization/propanepac/*.



Congressional Contact Form: With this new advocacy tool, NPGA members can inform the association staff about any personal connections they have with legislators. The idea is that when staff wants to meet a legislator, they can ask a member to make an introduction. "If you know folks, let us know; it will help our advocacy efforts to have a greater impact," Michael Baker, director, legislative affairs, explained. The Congressional Contact Form is available at *npga.org/propane-days-365/*.

Propane Logistics Analysis Network (PLAN): This crowdsourced online tool allows users to view and share the wait times at propane supply points. As this was written, there were more than 400 supply points listed. (See details on p. 33.) PLAN is available through an update to the NPGAction app and online at *https://plan.npga.org.* ■

NPGA'S PLAN

STEVE RELYEA

New online tool crowdsources wait times to boost industry efficiency

Last winter, National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) staff were making rounds of calls to see how long drivers were waiting at propane supply points. They needed this information to help determine if a federal hours-of-service waiver was required. As they were making the calls, Eric Sears, manager, state association relations, wondered, "What if there was an app for the propane industry?"

Now, in time for use this winter, there is. NPGA's new Propane Logistics Analysis Network (PLAN) online tool allows users to share their wait times or view others' reported wait times at more than 400 propane supply points across the country. NPGA notes that PLAN may be subject to error. PLAN is available online and through an update to the NPGAction app.

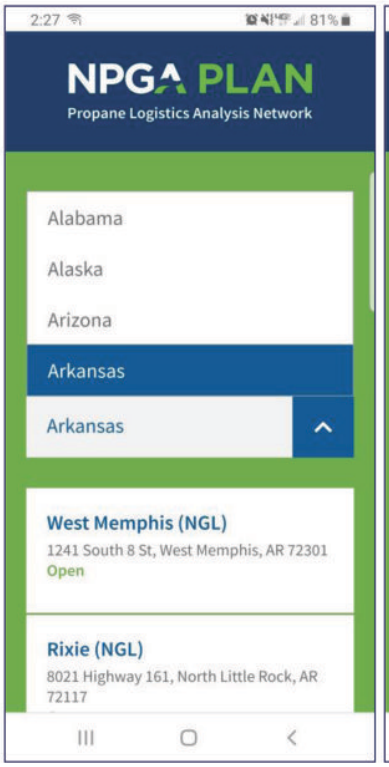
"Quite simply, the information you need will be at your fingertips, either at your desktop computer or on your mobile device," explains Lesley Brown Garland, vice president, state affairs at NPGA. "You won't have to make phone calls or rely on cameras. PLAN also links to NPGA's hours-of-service waiver alerts, so if the state you're working in has an active waiver or emergency declaration, it is highlighted for you so you don't have to go searching your state's department of transportation or highway patrol website."

VIEWING, REPORTING WAIT TIMES

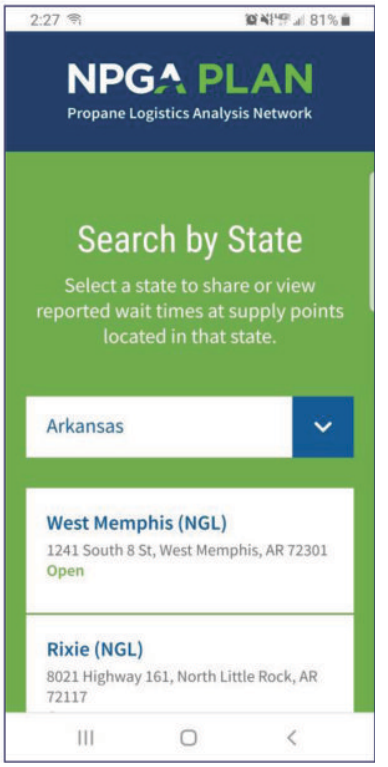
To see the reported wait time at a location, the user begins at PLAN's home page and chooses to search by state or use the device's location to find the closest supply points. After choosing a state, the user can view the terminals alphabetically. If there is an emergency declaration for a state, it will appear in a yellow bar. After selecting a location, the user can view its recently reported wait times.

Users of PLAN can also share their own wait time. To report a wait time at a location, the user chooses the state and the location; selects the wait time for the location; enters his or her name and phone number; and then submits the information. Wait times can be reported in two-hour increments, ranging from a 0-2-hour wait to a 12-plus-hour wait. Reported wait times are time- and date-stamped.

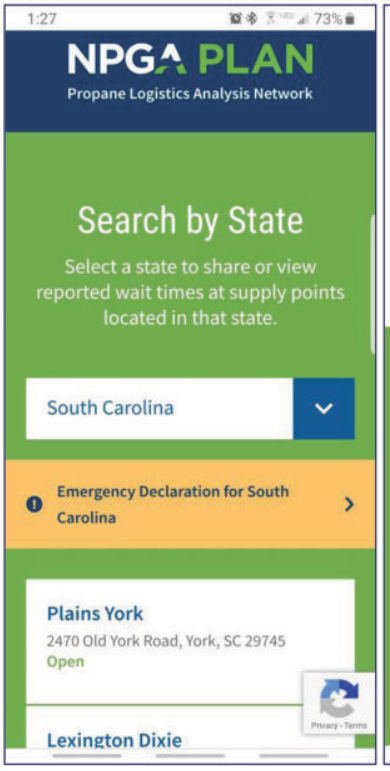
Because PLAN is a crowdsourced online tool, it relies on active user input. NPGA encourages drivers, dispatchers, terminal managers, and wholesaler suppliers to enter wait times at



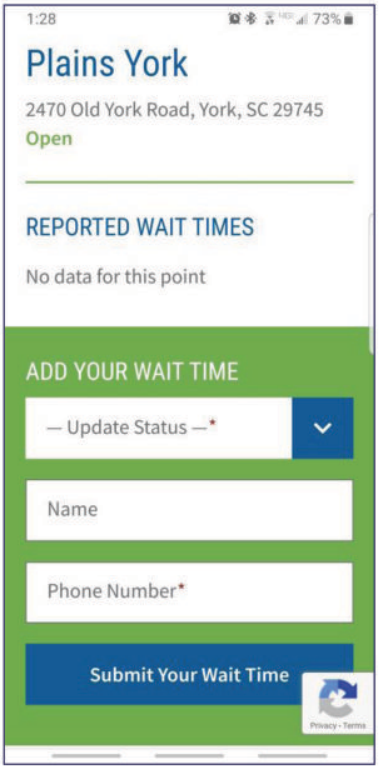
HOMEPAGE
Here the user will choose to search by state or use the device's location.



STATE
Choose the state your supply point is in and then view the terminals alphabetically



EMERGENCY DECLARATION
If there is an emergency declaration for a state it will appear in the yellow bar.



LOCATION
View the recently reported wait times and share your wait time.

supply points. By using the tool and adding their wait times, the association explains, users can help PLAN grow and provide timely information to the industry.

DEVELOPING THE PLAN

NPGA developed PLAN with the support of its Propane Supply & Logistics Committee and with the assistance of state and regional association executives as well as propane businesses.

During the development of the online tool, some of these industry experts were concerned that it would report on the storage capacity or volume available at a supply point. As a result, PLAN does not represent supply levels, pricing, or other market variables.

Another concern was that drivers can't use the app while they are driving. So, NPGA made PLAN simple and quick to use so a driver can open it while waiting in line or at their next stop and not violate any laws. PLAN is also accessible online so dispatchers or managers can submit wait times from drivers.

Some of those who assisted in the development of PLAN noted that supply points routinely close or shut down for maintenance or standard procedures. To answer that concern, NPGA added a feature that shows if a supply point is closed for maintenance. The association also asks PLAN users to inform staff when this happens, using the support link.

Some were concerned about the accuracy of information reported through crowdsourcing. "Crowdsourcing does open the door for mischief," Garland notes. "However, NPGA staff is monitoring PLAN, so when outlier reports come in, we will contact the person that submitted it to verify there wasn't an error made. If, for instance, there was an excessively long line reported at a terminal that was abnormal, then we discovered the contact information was invalid, we would remove the post from the system."

The launch of PLAN in September was one of NPGA's four "90-Day Criticals" for the third quarter of 2019.

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY

"Since the tumultuous winter of 2013-14, the National Propane Gas Association and Propane Education & Research Council have worked with propane marketers, wholesalers, transportation providers, government and policy makers, as well as state and regional associations to provide tools and resources to prepare and respond to key weather events and logistical disruptions," Garland explains.

PLAN is the latest addition to those tools and resources. By providing information on wait times, it will help NPGA justify the need for an hours-of-service waiver and it will help propane marketers select the supply point with the shortest wait so drivers can spend their time delivering propane rather than waiting to pick up supply.

PLAN is available online at *https://plan.npga.org* and through an update to the NPGAction app. To get the NPGAction app, visit the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store.

To ask any questions about PLAN, or to report any supply points that are not in the system, email NPGA at *plan@npga.org.* ■



INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC LOCKS PROVIDE MANY BENEFITS

STEVE RELYEA

Five years ago, Frank Minnella was talking with a neighbor who was in the propane business. He asked what propane marketers do when someone doesn't pay, and was told that the operator usually cuts them off. Minnella wondered if they locked off the tank. As CEO of Lock America (Corona, Calif.), he saw an opportunity. He knew his company could apply its expertise to provide security and other benefits for the propane industry.

Today, Lock America offers two high-security locks for propane tanks. While designed specifically for this industry, the locks benefit from the company's 30-plus years of experience developing security solutions for the vending, gaming, and self-storage industries.

"The development of these locks was customer-driven," Rich Morahan, marketing consultant to Lock America, tells ***BPN***. "Frank saw a need for protection and revenue enhancement. Based on his knowledge of the self-storage industry, he knew propane marketers needed a way to lock their tanks."

SCREW-ON FITTING

One of the products offered by Lock America is the Fill Valve Lock, which prevents unauthorized fills of tanks owned by the propane marketer. The Fill Valve Lock is a screw-on fitting with a slip ring on the top. When installed, the cap just spins when turned, preventing access to the tank without a key. The authorized delivery driver just puts his key in the slot, turns it, lifts off the cap, and pumps in propane.

"This is designed to lock out delinquent customers and slow-pay customers," Morahan explains. "If a customer owes you money, and your tank is not locked, he can call around to get propane from someone else who will give him 90 days to pay. The solution, like in self-storage, is to lock them out. Don't let them shop around and put someone else's propane in your tank."

When beginning to lock their tanks, he adds, propane marketers typically start with delinquent and slow-pay customers and then expand to all customers.

"Another benefit is that the lock prevents tampering," Morahan says. "A cheap device allows a customer to tamper with your tank. We know of at least two cases in which natural gas and propane marketers have been subject to lawsuits because a customer tampered with their tank."

The other propane industry-specific product offered by Lock America is the POLock, which prevents unauthorized connections. The POLock works similarly to the Fill Valve Lock, but secures the output valve.

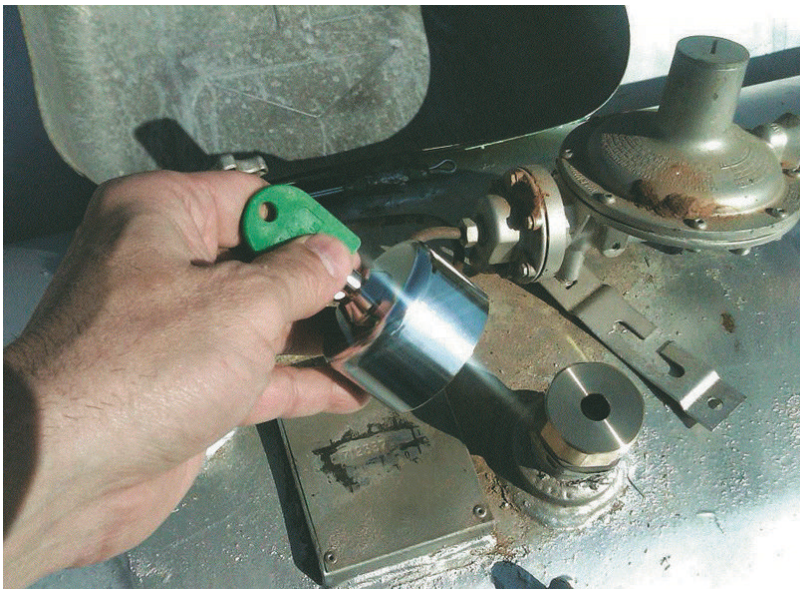
"If a customer owes money, again, you own the tank so you can lock them out," Morahan says. "They can't take this cap off without using a key."

Both the Fill Valve Lock and the POLock are designed specifically for the propane industry and for these purposes. Both feature brass and chrome-plated brass components and are pick- and drill-resistant.

In addition, each Lock America customer gets a unique key code. They can have as many locks with that key code as they'd like, and all their locks will open with one key. The same key code can also be used for locks on the company's gate and office. With this registered key code, the customer is the only person authorized to order a replacement key.

"This company started in the vending industry," Morahan notes. "A company would have, say, 20 machines in east Massachusetts and 20 machines in south Massachusetts. Lock America would make one key that would be the same for all the locks."

"Lock America has over three decades in the security lock business," he concludes. "Building on the same principles as the vending, gaming, and self-storage industries, but specifically designed for the propane industry, these locks provide safety, security, liability protection, and revenue enhancement." ■



The Fill Valve Lock prevents unauthorized fills of tanks owned by the propane marketer. It is a screw-on fitting with a slip ring on the top. The cap just spins when turned, preventing access to the tank without a key.

PERC'S NEW TEAM DEVOTED TO SAFETY, EDUCATION

STEVE RELYEA

Recent changes are designed to make the Certified Employee Training Program (CETP) more flexible, quicker to act, and more responsive to marketers' needs. Among the changes: the training and certification components of CETP are being brought together under one roof, a new team is in place to manage the program, and functions previously performed by vendors will now be done in-house.

"We are taking our training to a new level," says Eric Kuster, who joined the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) in August as vice president of safety, education, and compliance. He is a propane industry veteran who previously served as director of safety and certification at the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA). Kuster now heads a new safety, education, and compliance team at PERC.

PERC will soon be the home of all assets of CETP. In September, NPGA and PERC announced that they had reached agreement on terms to transfer the certification assets of CETP from NPGA to PERC, effective Dec. 31. These include all training records, tests, and skills evaluations for the more than 100,000 propane professionals who have been certified since the program began in 1987. PERC has owned the CETP training program and Gas Check since 2002; with the addition of the certification and skills evaluation components of the program, all parts of CETP now will be overseen by PERC.



Photo courtesy of PERC

NEW IN-HOUSE CAPABILITIES

PERC's new safety, education, and compliance team headed by Kuster also includes Lyndon Rickards, director of safety and compliance; Emily Wood, educational content development coordinator; and Christopher Hanson, learning management system (LMS) administrator. Hanson joined PERC in May and the others joined in August. (See ***BPN*** Oct. 2019, p. 36)

This new team will perform functions previously done by vendors. The LMS, which had been managed by a vendor since CETP was created 33 years ago, will now be managed at PERC by Hanson. "As we coordinate all the blended learning and the modularized training materials, it was prudent to have the LMS under our umbrella so we can make changes," Kuster explains. The LMS will be the central system for the delivery of all PERC training, certification, and compliance programs. These will be available through the PERC LMS as of Jan. 1, 2020.

The PERC LMS can also house, track, and retain records for a company's safety and compliance programs. "The LMS is becoming a compliance tool for the industry as well as a training and documentation tool," Kuster says. "It tracks training, certification, driver's license expiration dates, and medical card expirations—all to help with compliance issues. It also has reporting capabilities that notify users about upcoming needs for updates, refresher training, and new employee progress."

The content, too, had been managed by a contractor; it will now be created within PERC by Wood. "We wanted control of the content so we can make changes on a moment's notice," Kuster says. "Codes change every three years, and we need to update the material. This is the best way for us to be very proactive in making changes."

The fourth member of the new team, Rickards, will help both write the content and promote safety. "With Lyndon, we can make sure the materials are reviewed by a subject matter expert who has worked in the industry," Kuster says. "He has been in the industry many years; he has lived it, breathed it, and worked it. With his level of expertise, we won't have to lean on our

volunteers as much as we did for writing content. He will also promote a proactive safety culture by going out and talking at industry events and by heading the training conference."

TASK-SPECIFIC TRAINING

Through the end of 2019, there will be no changes to CETP. Then, through the end of 2020, everything that is now available will still be available, but it will be on the PERC LMS and some of the training programs will begin to be available in smaller modules. After that, changes to the training and certification programs will be incorporated into the CETP program. "We are not sure what all the changes will look like and are gathering feedback from all industry stakeholders," Kuster says. "Based on that feedback, we will present options to the council by early summer, but there will be no program changes taking effect until 2021."

One change that is underway is breaking CETP training programs into smaller pieces. In this new modularized approach, today's 14 certification areas will be broken up into 45 to 50 individual modules. The new modules will be task-specific. The idea is that employees can be trained on a specific job function quickly, and do not have to waste time learning concepts they do not perform.

"We want to make training better, faster, cheaper," Kuster explains. "We want to use training time to the best advantage of both the employer and the employee. We want to make sure employees are training on specific tasks and don't waste time learning things they do not need to know to perform their jobs safely and effectively.

"Right now, we throw a lot of training at people at one time," he adds. "But people learn better in small chunks. That way, they can learn one task, practice it, and then move on to the next. Also, when it's presented in short pieces, they can quickly review something before going out and doing it in the field."

All the modules will be available online or on portable devices. Users will be able to access the PERC LMS through a desktop computer, a laptop, a cellphone, or an e-reader.

"We're making the LMS available on all platforms," Kuster says. "As the industry brings new employees in, we have realized that people learn differently and many consume information electronically. So we need a system that will serve the present employee base as well as future hires. With the LMS, we are positioned to do that. Plus, when they gain the knowledge online, more of the time spent with an instructor can be devoted to hands-on training."

As PERC considers changes to CETP, Kuster welcomes suggestions. "We want input from everyone into this 33-year-old program," he says. "I can't overstress this: We are listening. We want to know what your needs are as far as safety and training products. Is there training you need from us that we don't have now? Are there state regulations we could help meet with our training program? Are there needs in your state for licensing that takes additional training?"

Kuster invites members of the industry to email him with any questions or suggestions at *eric.kuster@propane.com*. ■



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World LPG Challenge'19
SAFETY COMPETITION

WORLD PROPANE CONTEST FOR BEST NEW SAFETY TECHNOLOGY

BILL STOMP

Propane is an amazingly versatile fuel, but as a combustible fuel, it requires strict safety requirements. Unfortunately, a simple Google search will reveal many very recent incidents where the unsafe use of propane has taken lives and decimated houses, businesses, families, and dreams.

As a dad of three daughters and one son, I know that all of our hearts ache when we hear the very real recording of a little girl calling 911 and, through tears, pleading, "Please help, my daddy is on fire!" It is an unspeakable tragedy, especially if industry safety precautions have failed her.

In addition to the personal, human aspect of safety issues, there is also the very real, negative impact they can have on our businesses and the families who make their living from working in our industry.

So, how do we eliminate these problems?

With the support of the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), the World LPG Association (WLPGA) held a global contest to find new solutions that may enhance safety. The goal of the World LPG Challenge '19 was to leverage new technology in a revolutionary way that would reduce safety risks, improve compliance, enhance safety training, and serve our industry for now and years to come.



The Propane Safety App (aka TankSpotter) was selected as one of three finalists in the World LPG Challenge '19 safety competition.

Forty different technologies entered the contest from the United States, Europe, Asia, and many other parts of the world. Each had to demonstrate its technology on video and provide in-depth explanations, examples, and testimonials in both written and video formats.

An American technology called the Propane Safety App (aka TankSpotter) was selected as one of three finalists. It provides several critical tools such as intelligent customizable inspections, forms, and documents—essentially auto-checking, auto-reporting, auto-filing, and auto-storing all critical field documents into a database for easy filtering, searching, and downloading. In our busy world, this app



The app incorporates all the tools a service tech, sales rep, delivery driver, safety rep, or manager could ever need.

eliminates hours of paperwork, spot checking, clerical labor, back-and-forth communication, human errors, lost paperwork, etc.

Next, it stores, uploads, sends, and tracks all safety-related and general training needed in the propane industry right to employees' smartphones. This enables them to complete and document their training anywhere and at any time, thereby decreasing training costs and increasing the accessibility of the best industry training to the busiest and most distant employees. As tracking and ensuring timely completion of assigned training can be a tedious task, it is programmed with an auto-reminder (affectionately called auto-nag), so management can use technology to help ensure everyone completes training on time with little or no extra effort needed on their part to do tedious follow-up.

Since drivers in the propane industry see more tanks in a day than a non-industry person sees in a month, the Propane Safety App is equipped to work on an easy-to-carry smartphone (Apple or Android). Drivers can have it in their pocket with hands free to pull the hose, and in 35 seconds or less, document every safety or maintenance issue they discover. Documentation includes a photo, video, geo-capture, sig-

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The Propane Safety App (aka TankSpotter) is available for Apple and Android smartphones and tablets.

nature, and date/time capture, and instantly sends the same to a database while notifying management by text and email and while flagging it in the dashboard and database if an issue is deemed urgent. Now every tank, regulator, and installation can be verified, inspected, and documented to ensure 100% safety at every installation.

Because propane industry technicians, drivers, sales reps, and management all wear many hats, this American-made app is similarly multifaceted. It incorporates all the tools a service tech, sales rep, delivery driver, safety rep, or manager could ever need. Its comprehensive collection of features includes service work orders, sales rep estimates, invoices, delivery driver forms, every inspection form in the industry, and, finally, an automatic scheduler—allowing management or sales reps to schedule customer installations and notify team members with a couple of clicks, thereby eliminating endless phone calls back and forth to the office and to other employees.

Imagine if, right now, you could download from the Apple or Android app store an affordable, easy-to-use, single app that managed your safety program; provided all your service, safety, sales, and maintenance forms; and covered all the paperwork your field employees use. Via the new technology that was selected as a finalist in the World LPG Challenge '19 sponsored by WLPGA and PERC, we may be able to take safety and marry it to smartphone/tablet app technology that reduces costs, time spent, and effort, while it improves compliance, and makes propane the safest fuel in America.

So if you and your team have an Apple or Android smartphone or tablet, you may want to try out the Propane Safety App (aka TankSpotter) available at *TankSpotter.com* and via the app stores. Improved safety and profitability for 2019 and beyond may only be one click away.

Bill Stomp is a war veteran; has helped over 200 propane companies improve sales, safety, and profits; and is an international presenter on these topics. He is a partner at TankSpotter.com *and* DigitalSoftwareServices.com.

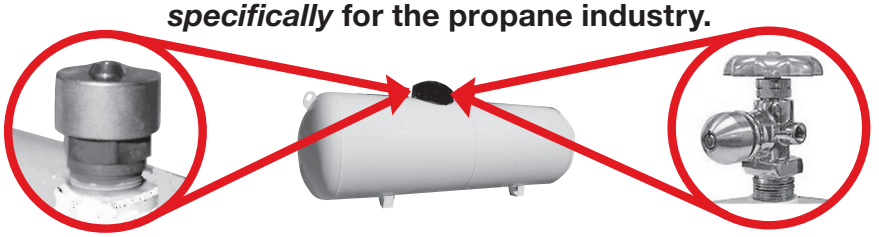


Lock Up Your Tanks—
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"Profits went up when we started locking our tanks. Now we're putting locks on all our new tanks, and gradually rolling them out to our entire inventory."
—Brian Wanner, Silvertip Propane, Billings, MT

"The main thing I want to point out is that I believe that the filler valve lock helps with collecting past due accounts, because we can lock off the tank preventing the customer from going to another company. It also prevents another company from servicing our lease tanks. ***By doing all this, the locks will pay for themselves fast."***
Mike Green, Green's Propane, Smithville, AL

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WHY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES REALLY MATTER

ERIC LESKINEN

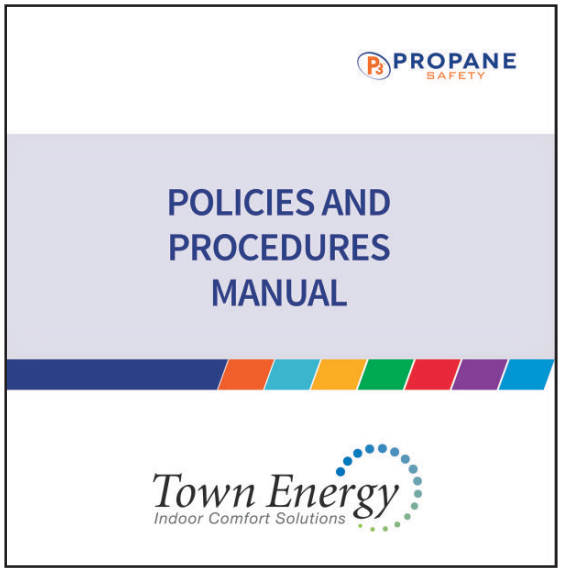
When it comes to staying compliant in the propane industry, all roads lead back to Policies & Procedures. Regulatory codes? Policies & Procedures identify how your company can meet them. Training? Policies & Procedures lead how your company trains new hires and retrains existing employees. Best practices for liability reduction and safety? Policies & Procedures are recommended and referred to by regulatory agencies, industry associations, and insurance providers.

The propane industry is guided by codes and regulations that can be federal, state, or local. Several key industry stakeholders reference and recommend Policies & Procedures to help propane marketers maintain compliance with these codes and regulations:

1. Propane Education & Research Council (PERC)—PERC creates training materials used by propane marketers across the country. PERC's CETP program provides training that frequently points trainees back to their companies' specific Policies & Procedures. For example, CETP 1.0 states in Module 2: "Know your company Policies & Procedures for documenting safety-related contacts with the customer. Be sure to document the question or concern that has been raised along with your response."

2. Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)—Policies & Procedures help companies maintain compliance with CFR roles and requirements.

3. Insurance Providers—EMC Insurance references on its website that propane marketers should have a Policies & Procedures Manual in place for many tasks, including performing lockout/tag out scenarios successfully.



POLICIES & PROCEDURES MUST BE INTEGRATED INTO YOUR BUSINESS

It's critical that your Policies & Procedures Manual is a living document and that it is updated as your company and code requirements change, and should be reviewed on an annual basis to include these changes. This will allow your team to discover and remediate shortcomings. If you have Policies & Procedures, when was the last time you reviewed them? Do you provide training to all employees regularly and to new employees as a part of the onboarding process? If you already have Policies & Procedures, or once you complete your first manual, it is important to recognize that this isn't a "one and done" deal.

For example, recent changes to the OSHA Crane Rule have deeply impacted the way many propane marketers conduct business. Your Policies & Procedures should reflect this new rule and employees should be trained according to your Policies & Procedures so that they are aware of the new Crane Rule and how it applies to their tasks.

BE PROACTIVE WITH POLICIES & PROCEDURES

If your company does not yet have a Policies & Procedures Manual, you should have one. Plain and simple. It is crucial in order to uphold a successful safety program, meet regulatory codes and requirements, and avoid dangerous scenarios or expensive fines. If you already have Policies & Procedures in place, make sure you review your manual at least once a year and make updates as code requirements change. Working with a safety professional can make reviewing and updating your Policies & Procedures Manual simpler and more convenient, and will ensure that your manual is up to date with industry code changes.

Eric H. Leskinen, executive vice president of P3 Propane Safety, has over 30 years of experience with career progression from field operations to corporate direction. He has designed, managed, and executed safety training and compliance programs for multistate companies with up to 1100 employees.



Charles Louis Ory, 71, passed away at his home in Mesa, Ariz. on Oct. 3. He fought his cancer valiantly throughout the last year of his life and kept his sense of humor until the very end.

Born in Greenville, Miss., his family moved to New Orleans during his junior high years. There he met his future wife, Teri, during his junior year of high school. The two married on July 4, 1969.

He drove a Frito-Lay truck in New Orleans, until he became so annoyed by the weather, the couple moved to Mesa, Ariz., where he continued to be employed by Frito-Lay.

Looking for a career change, Charlie was introduced to the propane industry. He worked for several companies before joining his friend, Jeff, to become co-owner of Aero Propane. As economic times became more challenging, the two began separate companies and Ory became sole owner of Family Propane.

The highlight of his career was his involvement with the Arizona Propane Gas Association (APGA) and the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA). In 2015, NPGA selected him to be the chairman of the association. Through APGA and NPGA he formed many friendships that he treasured.

While he loved his industry, his family was the most important part of his life. Even beyond his sons Chuck and David, and his daughters-in-law Nicole and Maria, his three grandchildren enriched his life the most. They meant the world to him.

A memorial service will be held on Saturday, Nov. 16, at 11:00 a.m., at Mariposa Gardens located at 6747 E. Broadway Rd., Mesa, Ariz., followed by a reception at Mariposa Gardens. APGA has established a scholarship in Charlie's honor.

Donations in his name may be sent to APGA or the National Propane Gas Foundation Scholarship Fund.



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PATRICIA MULLIGAN
Mulligan Propane



GEORGE JENKINS
Marshall Excelsior Co.

Patricia (Patti) Mulligan, 59, passed away Oct. 8 in Jacksonville, Fla. She began her career in the propane industry at Wilford Propane, and later owned Mulligan Propane. When her company was acquired by Sams Gas, she became one of that company's employees. Mulligan was a member of the Florida Propane Gas Association board of directors and led the Marketing and Autogas Committee as chair for a number of years. In addition, she was directly appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture to serve on the Florida Propane Education and Research Council.

George Jenkins has been named OEM truck and plant sales manager for **Marshall Excelsior Co.** (MEC; Marshall, Mich.). Jenkins has been in the LPG and NH_3 industry for 38 years, beginning in 1979 as a machinist at Corken. Over time he



The Pennsylvania Propane Gas Association (PAPGA), for the first time in its history, recently presented its Distinguished Service Life Award. The award is given to individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the association or to the propane industry. It grants the recipient lifetime membership in the Association. The award was presented to Hugh A. (Bud) Rich Jr. of Richgas Inc. (Kane, Penn.).

According to PAPGA records Rich, Jr. was elected to the board of directors in 1968 and stepped down June, 2019, 51 consecutive years. He is a past president and also was the inaugural president to serve a two-year term, 1971-1973.



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PAULA LANEY
Energy Distribution Partners

worked his way into the quality department, led the shipping and receiving team, until moved into customer service. From there, he transitioned to outside sales where he focused on servicing the industrial gas and LPG market. He will be headquartered out of Oklahoma City.

Paula Laney has joined **Energy Distribution Partners** (EDP; Chicago) as director of safety and training. Laney has been involved with the propane industry for more than 25 years, including more than 20 years in the area of safety training and education. She grew up in the propane industry, gaining experience early-on working with her parents in their family-owned propane operation, Liberty Propane, in Cookson, Okla.

For nearly 20 years, she served as the director of safety, training and education for the Oklahoma LP Gas Research, Marketing and Safety Commission, in addition to providing independent safety training and consulting workshops to various propane gas associations nationwide. Laney also served as the propane industry representative on the Oklahoma Uniform Building Code Commission's Alternative Fuels Technical Committee and the Fuel Gas, Mechanical, and Plumbing Technical Committee. Prior to the establishment of the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), she served on NPGA's Education Training & Safety (ETS) Committee. More recently, she has worked closely with PERC and other safety professionals.

Continued on **Page 52**

INDUSTRY CALENDAR

2019

Nov. 10-12—Air Conditioning, Heating & Refrigeration Institute Leadership Forum, Wyndham Grand Rio Mar, Puerto Rico. (703) 524-8800

Nov. 12-13—PERC Council Meeting, Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club, Naples, Fla. (202) 452-8975

Nov. 12-14—IHS Markit Latin American LPG Seminar & Workshops 2019, JW Marriott Hotel Quito, Quito, Ecuador. (800) 447-2273

Nov. 19-21—Power-Gen International, Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, New Orleans. (888) 299-8016

Nov. 20-21—2019 Leadership Summit, The Madison Washington D.C., Washington, D.C. (202) 466-7200

Nov. 26-27—East Africa Oil & Gas Summit & Exhibition, Intercontinental Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya. *info@eastafricanchamber.org*

2020

Jan. 21-23—NAHB International Builders' Show, Las Vegas Convention Center, Las Vegas, Nev. (800) 368-5242 ext. 8610

Feb. 3-5—2020 AHR Expo, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Fla. (203) 221-9232

Feb. 9-11—National Propane Gas Association Winter Board of Directors Meeting, DoubleTree Resort by Hilton Paradise Valley, Scottsdale, Ariz. (202) 466-7200

Feb. 10-12—The ARA Show, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Fla. (800) 334-2177

Feb. 11-13—World Ag Expo, International Agri Center, Tulare, Calif. (800) 999-9186

Feb. 12—PERC Council Meeting Conference Call. (202) 452-8975

Feb. 15—Deadline for Submitting National Propane Gas Foundation Scholarship Applications.

Feb. 27-28—2020 PACEshow, Kansas City Convention Center, Kansas City, Mo. (785) 233-9655

March 3-6—The Work Truck Show 2020 including the Green Truck Summit, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis. *info@ntea.com*

March 8-10—National Propane Gas Association Spring TS&S Committee Meeting, Hilton Palacio Del Rio, San Antonio, Texas (202) 466-7200.

March 12-13—National Propane Gas Association Spring Benchmarking Council Meeting, Dallas/Ft Worth Airport Marriott, Irving, Texas. (202) 466-7200

March 12-14—Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Expo, Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, New Orleans, La. *vandermark@hpba.org*

March 23-24—West Virginia Propane Gas Association Spring Membership Meeting, Embassy Suites, Charleston. (703) 530-9772

March 24-26—M-Pact Show, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis. (859) 219-3515

April 6-8—Manufactured Housing Institute 2020 Congress & Expo, MGM Grand, Las Vegas. *info@mfghome.org*

April 6-8—National Propane Gas Association Southeastern Convention & International Propane Expo, Music City Center, Nashville, Tenn. (202) 355-1334

April 6-9—NCI's High Performance HVAC Summit, We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center, Fort McDowell, Arlz. (800) 633-7058

April 9—PERC Council Meeting, Music City Center, Nashville, Tenn. (202) 452-8975

April 19-22—GPA Midstream Convention, New Orleans Riverside Hilton, New Orleans. (918) 493-3872

April 20-21—Energy, Utility, Environment Conference, San Diego Convention Center, San Diego, Calif. *info@euec.com*

May 5-7—Canadian Propane Association Leadership Summit, The Westin Edmonton, Edmonton, Alta. (613) 683-2270

May 11-14—Advanced Clean Transportation (ACT) Expo, Long Beach Convention Center, Long Beach, Calif. *events@gladstein.org*

May 13-15—Western Propane Gas Association Show & Convention, Reno Events Center, Reno, Nev. (916) 447-9742

May 27-28—European LPG Congress 2020, Fira Barcelona Montjuic- Hall 2, Barcelona, Spain. *info@europeanlpgcongress2020.com*

May 28-31—Mississippi Propane Gas Association Summer Convention, Hilton Sandestin Resort, Miramar Beach, Fla. *info@mspropane.com*

June 8-11—Mid-States Propane Expo and Tradeshow, Hilton Branson Convention Center, Branson, Mo. (800) 601-9332

June 9-11—Global Petroleum Show 2020, Stampede Park, Calgary, Alta. (403) 444-6523

June 14-17— National Propane Gas Association Presidential Forum, Annual Meeting, and Propane Days, Omni Shoreham, Washington, D.C. (202) 466-7200

June 15-18—NFPA Conference & Expo, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Fla. (800) 344-3555

June 22-25—North Central Propane Convention & Trade Show, La Crosse Convention Center, La Crosse, Wis. (515) 564-1260

July 8-9—West Virginia Propane Gas Association Summer Membership Meeting, Stonewall Resort, Roanoke. (703) 530-9772

July 12-14—Virginia Propane Gas Association Summer Meeting, Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, Virginia Beach. (804) 648-6299, ext. 1004

July 16-17—National Propane Gas Association Summer Benchmarking Council Meeting, Sheraton Inner Harbor, Baltimore. (202) 466-7200, ext. 335

July 21-22—PERC Council Meeting, location tba, Beaver Creek, Colo. (202) 452-8975

July 28-30— Great Lakes Propane Convention, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio Propane Gas Associations' Joint Summer Convention, JW Marriott Hotel, Grand Rapids, Mich. (317) 655-4444

Aug. 5-7—Pacific Propane Gas Association Annual Conference & Membership Meeting, Sunriver Resort, Sunriver, Ore. (844) 585-4940

Aug. 12-13—Northeast Propane Show, DCU Center, Worcester, Mass. *leslie@pgane.org*

Sept. 13-15—National Propane Gas Association Fall TS&S Committee Meeting, Westin Cincinnati, Cincinnati. (202) 466-7200, ext. 335

Sept. 27-29—National Propane Gas Association Fall Board of Directors Meeting, Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. (202) 466-7200

Nov. 2-4—33rd World LPG Forum, Dubai World Trade Center, Dubai. *association@wlpga.org*

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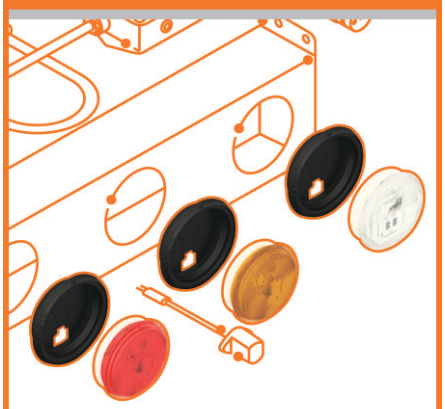
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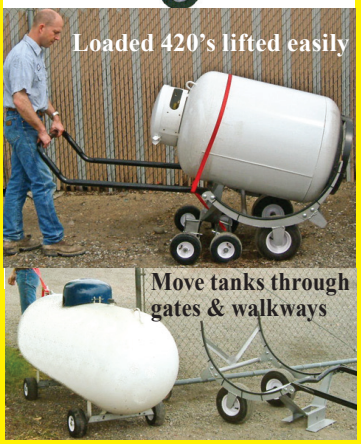
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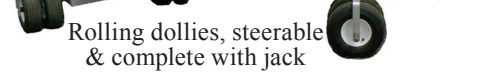
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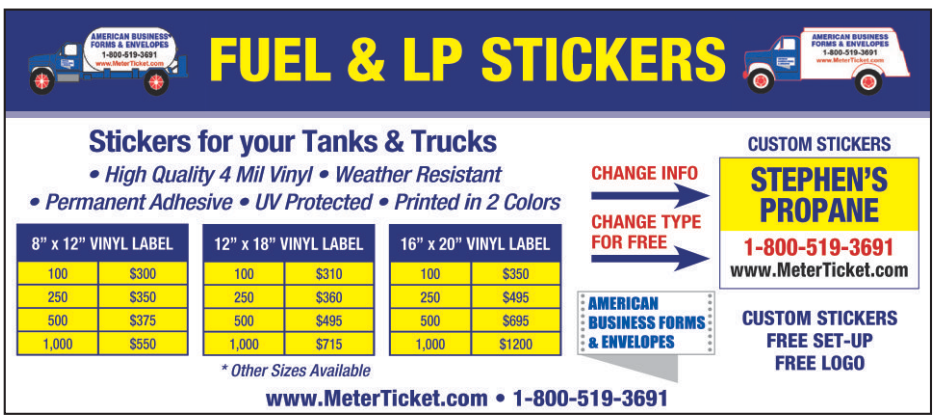
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PEOPLE

Continued from **Page 44**

Jessie Weldon Taylor passed away Sept. 6 in Fort Worth, Texas. He began his long career in the propane industry in 1965, working for Arrow Gas Co. as a district salesman and supervisor until 1977. He was appointed as the Commissioner of the Liquid Petroleum Bureau and served from 1976 until 1979. In 1979, he went into private business and founded wholesale petroleum companies such as Petro Fuels, TMI Inc. and later NGL Transport. Taylor also started a retail propane company, AAA Propane, in Pagosa Springs, Colo. He was an active industry voice and marketer until his retirement in 1999.

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Il certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. *(Signed) Sheri Sinske, Circulation Manager.*

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SEIZING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES WITH DETERMINATION

KAREN MASSMAN VanASDALE

More than six years ago, at the suggestion of her mother-in-law, Chelsea Harrison applied to be the first in-house marketing/graphic designer for Foster Fuels in Brookneal, Va. She was a graphic designer with no prior knowledge of the fuel industry and no management experience.

Today, as the vice president of marketing, Harrison manages a creative team of six for the company, which has grown from 65 employees when she began to 185 employees currently. Her role encompasses developing strategic marketing initiatives and overseeing the creation of all communications, including social media, multimedia, printed collateral, public relations, and advertising.

"If you'd asked me six years ago, I just would not have seen the growth," she said. "Looking back on it and how things came to fruition and how I was given the opportunity to do more and more—it's better than I would have ever expected. I love being able to work with a creative team and a company that supports you."

Established in 1921, Foster Fuels Inc. is a privately held corporation with seven locations in Virginia, providing distribution of diesel, gasoline, Jet A, and propane to residential, commercial, and governmental customers. It also has an award-winning emergency fuel division, Mission Critical, specializing in business continuity and disaster recovery solutions. This year, the company was awarded a five-year contract from the Defense Logistics Agency to deliver emergency fuel support to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during emergencies. The company has held a similar contract since 2006. The current contract covers all 50 states, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.



Harrison's ability and determination to learn, a company culture of trust and empowerment, and Foster Fuels' intentional growth is bringing continued success to both her and the company.

She maintains the same "sure we can make it happen attitude" she's had since tackling her first project at Foster Fuels, turning a 40-page technical brochure into a one-page handout. It was a challenge, she said, but she was able to break it up into simple, understandable pieces both she and customers could understand.

"I had a lot to learn about fuel, and I feel like I am still learning. There are so many new things happening," she said. "We try to stay up with what our customers are using and how we can reach them. We have seen things change."

Although printed materials are still part of the marketing mix, Harrison has helped launch a mobile app and multiple social media platforms to better serve customers. She also recently implemented marketing automation software.

Rapid growth of the company and her department have brought some growing pains, she admitted. "Your weak areas become prevalent without your even knowing. Simple things like space in the office and processes. When it was just you, you could do it one way, but add more people and, to me, it's an opportunity to ask 'how can we improve?'"

One way Harrison keeps up with industry trends is by utilizing resources provided by the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC). Last year, she attended the organization's first Can-Do Conference specifically focused on marketing training. "I found that to be very valuable. I was able to make some connections," she said. "You can be hard on yourself. It was helpful to meet others having the same challenges."

A support system at work along with friends and nearby family has enabled Harrison to have a healthy work-life balance. Originally from North Carolina, she and her husband, Tyler, have a 2-year-old daughter, two toy poodles, and demanding jobs. Tyler is a first responder paramedic and until recently played in a band. The couple met when they were both on the cheerleading team at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va. ■

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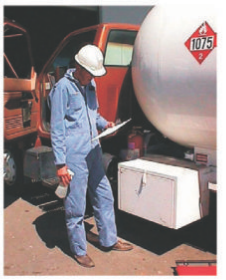
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