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AWARENESS DAYS BUILD COMMUNITIES

STEVE RELYEA

As the industry worldwide celebrated #LPGday on June 7, social media lit up with fun facts about propane and the value of the propane industry. The reach of each post was magnified by the #LPGday hashtag. Anyone interested in one post could click on the hashtag and read other posts offering information about propane, its qualities, and its applications. Further, this second-annual #LPGday placed special emphasis on the contributions propane has made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An awareness day like this is something small businesses can latch onto to build awareness, goodwill, and sales in their own local market. These events provide a way to start a conversation with local media and pitch an article in a non-sales environment. When you contact reporters to ask for coverage, you can tell them why you and others are celebrating the day.

Of course, with social media, you can also create and distribute content of your own. An awareness day creates a focused day on which to give attention to one of the many aspects of the propane industry. There are days focused on recognizing different sorts of employees, industries, and hobbies involved with propane. Each provides an opportunity to engage with one of the many communities you serve.

I have seen propane marketers share on social media Mom and Pop Business Owners Day (March 29), Earth Day (April 22), National Barbecue Month (May), National Forklift Safety Day (June 13), National HVAC Tech Day (June 22), National Petroleum Day (Aug. 27), Customer Service Week (first full week in October), and Small Business Saturday (last Saturday of November). To find more, Google “awareness days” or scroll through industry members’ social media posts.

The World LPG Association (WLPGA), which initiated #LPGday, is promoting another social media event to be held Nov. 4: #AutogasDay. WLPGA encourages industry members to help build awareness of the benefits of autogas by organizing activities and using #AutogasDay on social media on Nov. 4. ■



Otodata (Montreal) celebrated #LPGday with a photo and text highlighting the courage and commitment of its customer support and production teams in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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OUR COVER

Started from day one as a mobile technology platform, Cargas Energy has allowed customers to thrive during the pandemic. Photo courtesy Cargas Energy.

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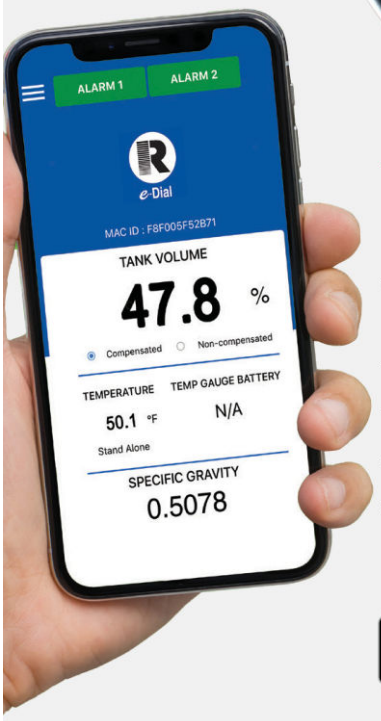
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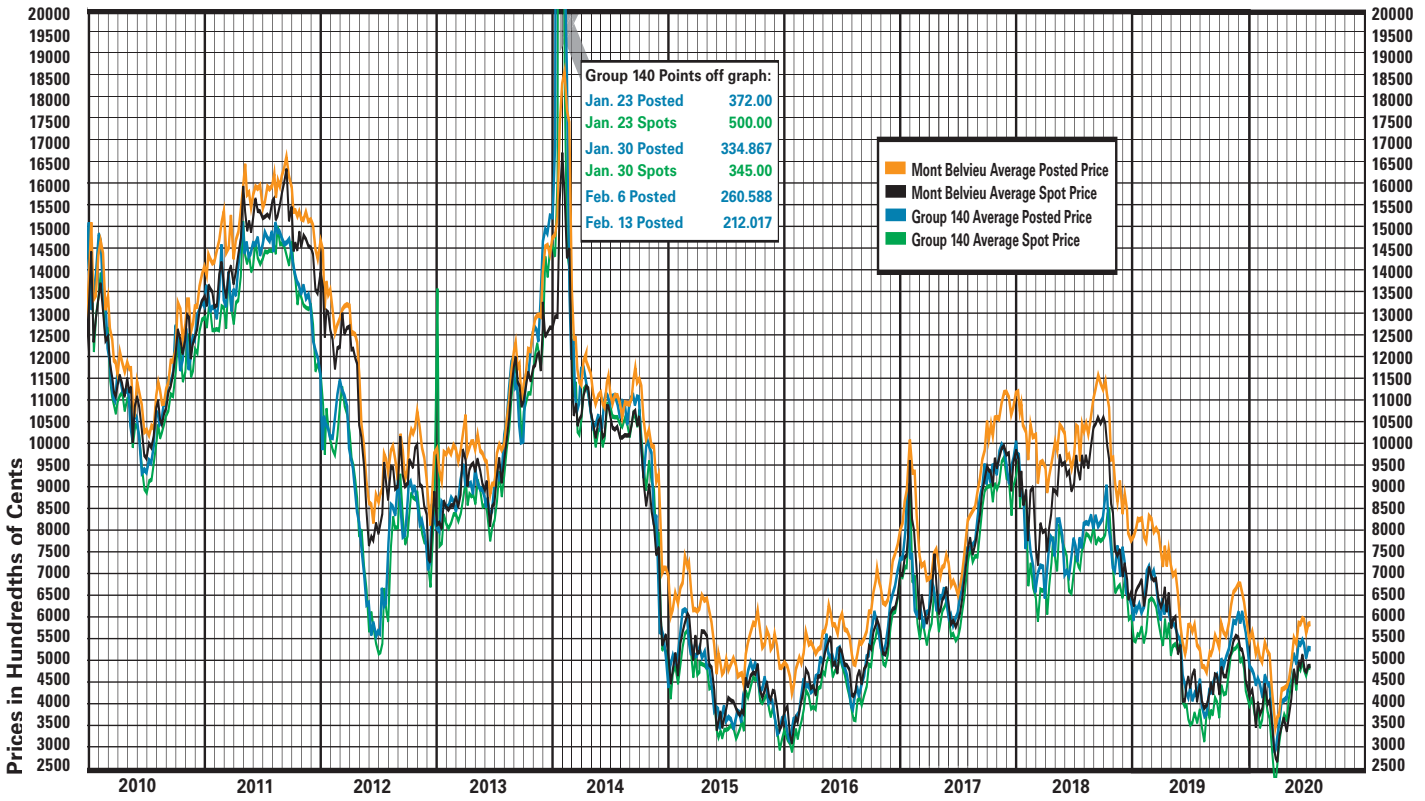


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MONT BELVIEU & GROUP 140 AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES

MID-WEEK AVERAGE POSTED/ SPOT PROPANE PRICES

(Cents per Gallon)

Date	Mont Belvieu		Group 140	
	POSTED	SPOT	POSTED	SPOT
6-18-20	59.840	50.50-51.25	54.970	49.50-49.75
6-25-20	59.757	47.50-47.875	53.920	46.875-47.50
7-2-20	56.007	46.50-47.125	50.570	45.875-46.375
7-9-20	58.173	48.54-48.75	52.970	47.50-48.25
7-16-20	58.340	48.25-48.75	52.919	47.50-48.125

CANADIAN INVENTORIES

(July 1, 2020)
Thousand Cubic Meters

PROPANE

Region	7-20	6-20	Change	7-19
Propane—East	592.5	448.5	+32.1%	233.8
Propane—West	872.9	611.8	+42.7%	584.2
Total Propane	**1465.4**	**1060.3**	**+38.2%**	**818.0**

BUTANE

Butane—East	351.4	323.4	+8.7%	292.7
Butane—West	664.1	534.0	+24.4%	458.7
Total Butane	**1015.4**	**857.4**	**+18.4%**	**751.5**

Source: National Energy Board

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

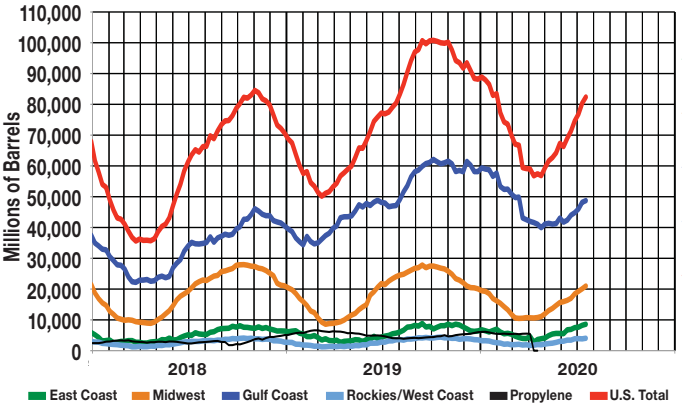
(June 19, 2020 to July 17, 2020 and One Year Ago)
Thousand Barrels

	6/19/20	6/26	7/3	7/10	7/17	7/19/19
East Coast	6,896	7,486	7,632	8,239	8,599	5,482
Midwest	17,001	18,434	19,276	20,088	21,000	23,364
Gulf Coast	43,998	44,807	46,008	48,179	48,743	42,927
Rockies/West	3,437	3,872	3,908	3,841	4,046	3,194
U.S. Total	71,331	74,599	76,823	80,348	82,388	74,967
Propylene	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4,085

Source: Energy Information Agency

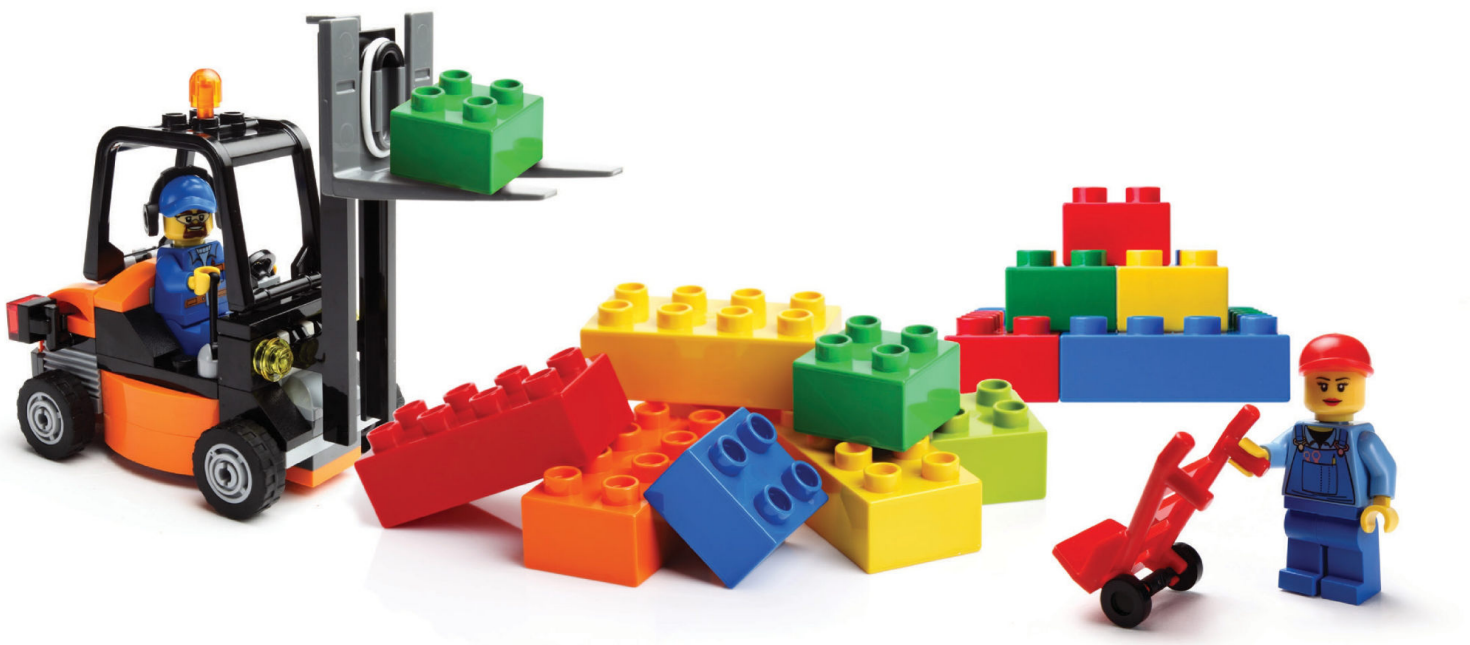
U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Jan. 1, 2018 to June 19, 2020



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THOMPSONGAS ACQUIRES CALIFORNIA PROPANE OPERATION

ThompsonGas (Frederick, Md.) has acquired the propane operations of Redwood Coast Fuels (Ukiah, Calif.), a propane provider in the northwestern part of the state. It is committed to serving the residential, commercial, and wholesale customers who have valued Redwood Coast Fuels' propane presence and service in the area for many years.

"We are pleased to add Redwood Coast Fuels propane customers to the ThompsonGas family. The Redwood Coast Fuels propane division presents a unique opportunity to expand the Northwest California operations of our established branches throughout the area," said Jeff Kerns, CEO.

"The ability to add such a well-run company into our current operations located in Ukiah, Laytonville, Fort Bragg, and Lower Lake communities in California adds value to all of our ThompsonGas customers. We are excited to continue to expand our territory in northwest California," said Jim Davis, COO.

"One of my objectives was to find an organization prepared to continue to develop the reputation and local talent base that we have built up through three generations since 1951. Our family has been privileged to serve the northern California energy market starting with my grandfather Peter Barbieri, my father Bob, and now myself. We believe the ThompsonGas team will continue to uphold that legacy" said Nick Barbieri, owner and managing partner.

This acquisition strengthens the ThompsonGas national footprint by expanding the company's presence in the Northwest. It now serves more than 200,000 customers in 20 states.

ENTERPRISE'S INDUSTRY FIRST AT HOUSTON SHIP CHANNEL

Enterprise Products Partners LP (Houston) reported July 14 it had successfully loaded combination cargoes of NGLs and olefins on the same vessel. During July, Enterprise completed the simultaneous loading of propane and polymer grade propylene into separate compartments on a VLGC at the Enterprise Houston Ship Channel terminal, as well as the simultaneous loading of ethane and ethylene on a vessel at its Morgan's Point facility.

Both vessels were the first export cargoes of their kind from the U.S. Co-loading olefins on larger vessels with NGLs allows for more efficient use of available export dock capacity, while also providing significant freight benefits to petrochemical export customers.

"This landmark accomplishment was made possible by our integrated midstream network, as well as the creativity and determination of our employees," said A.J. (Jim) Teague, co-chief executive officer of Enterprise's general partner. "Loading ethylene and propylene on larger vessels from the U.S. Gulf Coast substantially lowers freight costs and allows U.S. Gulf Coast producers to supply distant markets, such as Asia, more competitively. Enterprise continues to apply its proven midstream model to petrochemicals. Our reliable midstream services, including pipeline transportation, storage, processing, and exports, provide flexibility and reliability to our petrochemical customers so they can focus on their unique competitive advantages."

Enterprise Products Partners LP's services include: natural gas gathering, treating, processing, transportation, and storage; NGL transportation, fractionation, storage, and export and import terminals; crude oil gathering, transportation, storage, and export and import terminals; petrochemical and refined products transportation, storage, export and import terminals, and related services; and a marine transportation business that operates primarily on the U.S. inland and Intracoastal Waterway systems.

PROPANE HOMEPRO WEBSITE WINS NATIONAL DESIGN AWARD

The Propane HomePro website was recognized nationally in the 20th annual American Web Design Awards, sponsored by Graphic Design USA. More than 2000 entries were submitted in the national web design competition and only an elite top 10% were selected as winners.

The new website from MOPERC (Missouri Propane Education & Research Council) showcases propane homes in Missouri, sharing inspirational stories and videos, image galleries, progress photos, as well as builder plans. The HomePro website also shares information about featured propane appliances and more information about MOPERC's innovative new Propane HomePro program. Go to *www.propanehomepro.com* to view the award-winning website.

This new website is one of the core components of the new Propane HomePro program, which brings the complete home benefits of propane appliances to life in new, modern, and luxurious home construction projects across the state of Missouri. It also highlights all the advantages of building homes powered by propane and the opportunity to live the propane lifestyle, with benefits including superior home performance, efficiency, and comfort.

"One of the goals of the Propane HomePro program is to provide opportunities to talk to homebuilders and their customers about all the amenities that propane can provide," said Steve Ahrens, president of MOPERC.

"In Missouri, about 9% of homes are heated with propane. That is higher than the national average, but we still find that a lot of people are not familiar with propane," Ahrens added.

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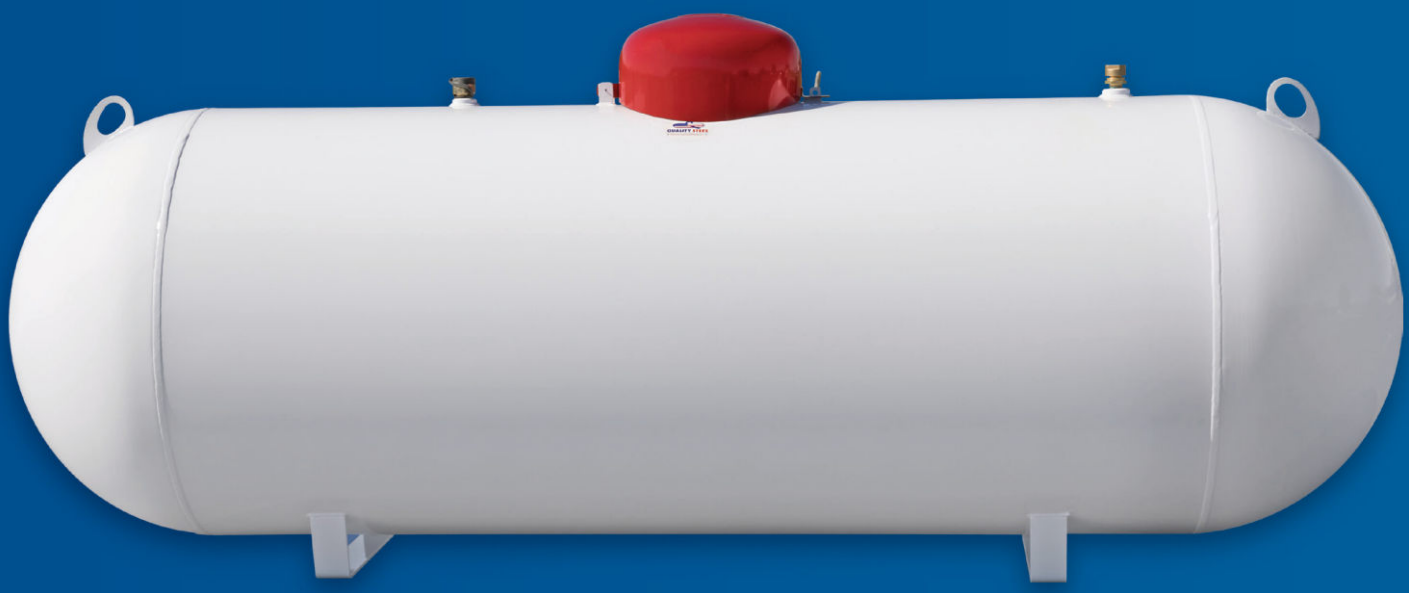
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"They may know about natural gas, or just default to electricity. But the fact is that propane really brings them so much more in terms of livability, economics, and efficiencies, and we are finding a very receptive audience when we talk about propane homes. We're proud to have this award-winning website available to help tell our story."

HILTZ PROPANE SYSTEMS BUYS CHESMONT ENGINEERING

Hiltz Propane Systems Inc. (Marietta, Pa.) plans to acquire Chesmont Engineering Co. Inc. (Exton, Pa.), to offer a unified engineering and turnkey solution to the propane and energy industry. In addition to its specialized expertise in propane systems, Chesmont, founded in 1973, brings engineering experience in the natural gas and industrial heat process industries. Hiltz Propane Systems will acquire Chesmont Engineering assets, employees, and customer contracts. The merged business was set to operate as part of the Hiltz Cos. beginning July 1. Terms of the transaction were not provided.

Matthew Hiltz, president and owner of Hiltz Propane Systems, commented, "We are pleased Chesmont has chosen to join our team after 47 years of dedicated service to their customers. This provides a major growth opportunity for both of our businesses through an extended service offering to our customers." Chris Mohler, CEO of Chesmont Engineering, added, "Chesmont offers an exciting opportunity for Hiltz to strengthen and expand its service offering in delivering turnkey solutions in the energy and process heating industries."

AUTOGAS DAY 2020 BEGINS NOV. 4

Autogas Day is a dedicated event that takes place annually to provide a high-level conference on the most recent autogas developments, as well as an opportunity for the LPG industry to get involved through local activities targeting key stakeholders worldwide.

With its successful start in Amsterdam during the 32nd World LPG Forum & European Congress last year, Autogas Day 2019 featured several international speakers addressing the benefits of driving with autogas; its contribution to cleaner air and its market potential; its success in several countries, as well as the challenges associated with the global energy transition. With 15 high-level speakers and nearly 200 participants, the foundation and interest for future events was set.





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Autogas Day 2020 will focus on emerging markets and aims to have speakers representing the entire value chain of the industry, in addition to policy makers from key markets, and energy experts. While the autogas market is well established in places like the European Union, there is tremendous potential for many regions. Autogas Day 2020 will provide an opportunity for those in the industry to understand how they might expand their business, and for key stakeholders to better understand the benefits of driving with autogas, and the critical policies needed to support its uptake.

Autogas Day 2020 will kick off on Nov. 4, with two additional sessions on Nov. 5 and 6. It will also provide an opportunity for market players to organize their own local initiatives to promote the benefits of driving with autogas, all on Nov. 4, in order to create more impact.

More details on the Autogas Day 2020 conference will be available shortly. The World LPG Association provided the dates for the conference to make industry members aware of this opportunity and give them time to prepare to discuss their participation internally.

For more information, contact co-organizers Filipa Rio at *frio@wlpga.org* or Angelique Berden *angelique.berden@wfsinc.com*. For sponsorship details, contact Esther Assous *eassous@wlpga.org.*

PERC: PRODUCERS SHOULD PLAN HARVEST ENERGY NEEDS SOON

With corn and soybean plantings up substantially compared to last year, the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) is reminding producers across the Midwest to plan well in advance of harvest season to ensure they have access to enough propane this fall. According to the USDA Planting Intentions report, corn planted in 2020 is estimated at 97 million acres, up 8% from 2019. Thirty-eight of the 48 states reporting corn as a planted crop are expecting plantings to be at or above 2019 levels.

Soybean plantings are reporting an even larger increase. According to the report, 83.5 million acres of soybeans will be planted in 2020, which is a 10% increase compared to last year. Twenty-two of the 29 states planting soybeans expect levels to be at or above those in 2019.

“More corn and soybeans planted means an increase in demand for propane, whether it’s used to power irrigation equipment or to help dry grain at harvest time,” said Mike Newland, director of agriculture business development for PERC. “Last year’s energy demand issues that played out at harvest time across the Midwest are still fresh in everyone’s mind, which



is why we're reminding farmers of a few steps they can take now to prevent potential issues later."

The Propane Council is encouraging farmers, especially in the Midwest states, to establish a strong line of communication with their propane suppliers now. "A quick conversation now can go a long way to preventing energy supply headaches later," Newland said.

As an added layer of preparedness ahead of the harvest season, the Propane Council recently launched a Grain Drying Calculator tool to help producers determine the number of propane gallons needed each season using just three simple data points. The tool allows users to estimate the amount of propane each operation will require, making it easier to fill tanks early and prepare for supply needs prior to an increase in demand. Users of the calculator simply input their average expected yield to determine the number of propane gallons needed to dry their crops by a specific moisture percentage. From there, PERC's tool will calculate approximately how many gallons of propane will be needed.

The tool is available at *https://propane.com/propane-products/grain-dryers/.*

For more information on propane agriculture equipment, resources, and news, visit *Propane.com.*

CONTINUED REBOUND OF U.S. PETROLEUM DEMAND

According to data released July 16 in the American Petroleum Institute's June 2020 Monthly Statistical Report (MSR), the broad recovery of U.S. petroleum markets continued in June with U.S. petroleum demand increasing nearly 9% to 17.6 MMbbld.

"Although we have a long way to go for U.S. petroleum markets to recover to pre-pandemic levels, the comeback broadly continued in June despite ongoing challenges with COVID-19," API chief economist Dean Foreman said. "While we are not out of the woods yet, we do appear to be headed in the right direction with the U.S. natural gas and oil industry well-positioned to play an important role in the recovery of the U.S. and global economies."

Motor gasoline accounted for more than 85% of the demand rebound as more motorists hit the road with the gradual reopening of state economies. While jet fuel deliveries rose for the first time in 2020, surging more than 41% May and June, they were still down more than 61% year-over-year.

On the supply side, U.S. crude oil production posted its



seventh consecutive monthly decline in June, falling 400,000 bbld to 11.0 MMbbld as producers continue to adjust output to align with lower energy demand as result of the pandemic. Production of natural gas liquids also declined in June, falling slightly more than 1% month-over-month. The production declines coincided with continued builds in U.S. crude oil inventories, which reached a record 538.8 MMbbl in May.

SAFETY PROGRAMS ADDED TO THE LEARNING CENTER

The Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) has added two more safety courses to its lineup on The Learning Center at *propane.com*. The latest program additions to the online learning platform are:

Bobtail Rollover Prevention, a video training program to help bobtail drivers understand the factors that contribute to a vehicle rollover. It also offers guidelines and tips that can be applied to minimize the risk of a rollover.

New 9.0 HVAC/Plumber Certification, a certification program developed for the HVAC and plumbing industry to validate comprehension of training on propane appliance and gas distribution system design, installation, and startup based on PERC's HVAC and Plumber Technical Training book.

For additional information, go to *propane.com/propane-learningcenter*. Click Safety Training, log in or register for a new account, then search for the individual program.

API WELCOMES USMCA IMPLEMENTATION

The American Petroleum Institute (API) welcomes the implementation of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which will bolster U.S. energy leadership while benefiting American workers and consumers.

As a member of the USMCA Coalition, API joined more than 200 companies and associations representing a wide cross-section of industries to emphasize the importance of free trade across the U.S. economy. The broad-based coalition was instrumental in securing the agreement's bipartisan approval in Congress.

API president and CEO Mike Sommers commented, "American trade policy has entered a new era of opportunity with the implementation of USMCA, paving the way for sustained U.S. energy leadership and stronger economic growth. This agreement provides a critical framework for free and fair trade across North America, making energy markets more accessible and serving as the foundation for new investments in natural gas and oil across our borders to deliver affordable, reliable energy to more communities. We encourage all parties to continue to engage diplomatically to ensure investment protections provided by USMCA are implemented successfully to realize the full benefits of this historic agreement."

According to the Business Roundtable, cross-border trade with Canada and Mexico supports 12 million American jobs and totaled nearly $1.3 trillion in 2017. Mexico and Canada are also top destinations for U.S. energy products with Mexico now the No. 1 export market for U.S. natural gas and refined products. Meanwhile, Canada is the biggest customer for U.S. crude oil, accounting for more than 30% of total crude oil exports.

API represents all segments of America's oil and natural gas industry. Its more than 600 members produce, process, and distribute most of the nation's energy. The industry supports 10.9 million U.S. jobs and is backed by a growing grassroots movement of millions of Americans.

PERC INTRODUCES PROPANE AUTOGAS LEARNING RESOURCES

The Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) has created online learning resources with educational information about propane autogas for fleets and service technicians who are beginning to return to work after recent shutdowns while navigating through new challenges.

"The pandemic has been a wakeup call and it has many fleets reevaluating their best practices and operational efficiencies, including their fuel choices," said Steve Whaley, director of autogas business development at PERC. "For fleets that aren't familiar with propane autogas, these resources are a great place to start to learn how the energy source can help reduce their costs and emissions. For fleets that already operate with propane autogas, these resources will help them smoothly get back to business."

The pages feature information about owning, maintaining, and operating propane autogas vehicles and the benefits of the fuel—including that propane autogas provides fleets with the most cost-effective solution to reducing harmful emissions.

Information on refueling, emissions studies, customer testimonials, and educational videos are provided on the fleet-specific pages. PERC's cost savings calculator to determine how much propane autogas could save them over time is included in the data for fleet owners.

The maintenance page has important information about garaging and maintenance facilities, how propane autogas maintenance compares to other fuels, and converting an existing gasoline vehicle to propane autogas.

The propane autogas learning resources are available at *propane.com/autogas-learning/*.

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THE FARMINGTON EXPLOSION—DRAMA AND CONSEQUENCES (PART 1)

DAVID R. SCHLEE

The report of the Maine State Fire Marshal regarding the propane explosion that struck Farmington, Maine, last September has now been made public. It reveals details of the events leading up the tragedy, in which one person was killed and seven others were injured. It is of interest to all in our industry.

UNDERGROUND LINE

The explosion occurred at a building that housed LEAP, a charitable organization that provides support and assistance for people with developmental, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities. The building had undergone a $450,000 renovation in early 2019, including a replacement of the propane system.

Propane was supplied to a 500-gal. tank near the building by local distributor CN Brown Energy. An underground propane line ran from the tank, underneath the parking lot and to the building at a depth of about 3 feet. The parking lot was paved in the summer of 2019. The propane line had been encased in a plastic protective sleeve.

There was an outdoor air conditioning unit next to the LEAP building, near the parking area. In September 2019, in order to protect this unit from vehicular damage, LEAP contacted Techno Post of Maine to install four protective bollards, or posts, around the unit. The metal bollards were about 4 inches in diameter and 10 feet long. Each bollard was sunk to a depth of about 7 feet, leaving about 3 feet above ground to protect the air conditioning unit.

The bollards were installed on Sept. 10. Techno Post used a large power auger to make a hole about 10 inches wide for each bollard. The auger would be used to drill a hole about 7 feet deep, and then the 10-ft bollard would be lowered into the hole. Backfill would then be added back into the hole to hold the bollard in place and upright.

"DIG SAFE"

The work undertaken by Techno Post is considered to be excavation, and therefore would have been covered by the Maine "Dig Safe" law. This law, which is similar to laws enacted in all states, requires that an excavator give notice to Dig Safe, a not-for-profit clearinghouse that notifies participating utility companies of the planned excavation. Dig Safe then notifies the utilities, which then use special locating equipment and mark the location of their underground lines. The lines are generally marked with painted lines on the surface of the ground. Excavators are then required to take special precautions to expose the marked lines at the point of excavation, so that the utility lines are not damaged.

The purpose of these laws, also often referred to as One Call or Blue Stake laws, is to prevent excavators from damaging underground gas, electric, communications, and water lines. Such damage, especially in the case of gas lines, can result in catastrophic damage and loss.

The laws gained favor in the 1990s as a technology known as directional boring allowed underground lines to be drilled into place without the need for digging a trench. Negligently performed directional boring has resulted in many serious gas explosions over the past several decades. However, there was a crucial loophole here because the Maine Dig Safe law did not apply to propane lines. So, as Techno Post was doing its work on Sept. 10, there were no painted marks on the ground to identify the location of the underground propane line.

But Dig Safe should have been called in any event, and it was not. There remains a dispute about who was responsible for that. Techno Post told investigators that it was relying on LEAP to handle the Dig Safe notice, but LEAP building maintenance supervisor Larry Lord, who was very seriously injured in the explosion, disputes that.

"GOOD TO GO"

A Techno Post employee said that he asked Lord whether he had called Dig Safe, and Lord said that he had: "We had them out here, we know where all the lines are, we're good to go." The owner of Techno Post says he spoke to Lord, who said that Dig Safe had been out to the site and he knew where everything was.

Lord allegedly said that he would mark the location where the bollards were to be installed. Lord, who spoke after being released from extensive hospital treatment, said that he showed Techno Post employees where the propane tank was located and where the propane entered the building. He added that he assumed that the Techno Post employees "knew what they were supposed to do." In any event, since the Dig Safe law did not require the locating and marking of propane lines, this likely would not have happened even if

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there was notice to Dig Safe.

EMPTY TANKS

On Friday, Sept. 13, LEAP building maintenance supervisor Larry Lord concluded that the propane tank was empty, and he called CN Brown. Later that day a CN Brown deliveryman arrived at the LEAP building. He concluded that the tank was not empty, so he filled the tank and left. He did not conduct a leak test of the propane system downstream of the tank.

"FULL ALARM"

On the following Monday morning, Sept. 16, a LEAP maintenance worker became dizzy after spending a short time inside the building. Larry Lord investigated and discovered that the propane tank, which had been filled on Friday, was empty. Lord called the fire department, opened windows and doors, and told all employees to leave the building. Fire department personnel arrived at 8:13 a.m.

Firefighters entered the building with Lord to try to locate the propane leak. At first, firefighters could not smell gas and were getting no readings on the gas detection equipment they were using. However, that changed when they entered the basement. One firefighter said: "When I got to the basement, finally on the ground level the alarm went into full alarm at 100 ppm, which our max is at." They were looking for an electrical panel, presumably to shut the power down to eliminate sources of ignition.

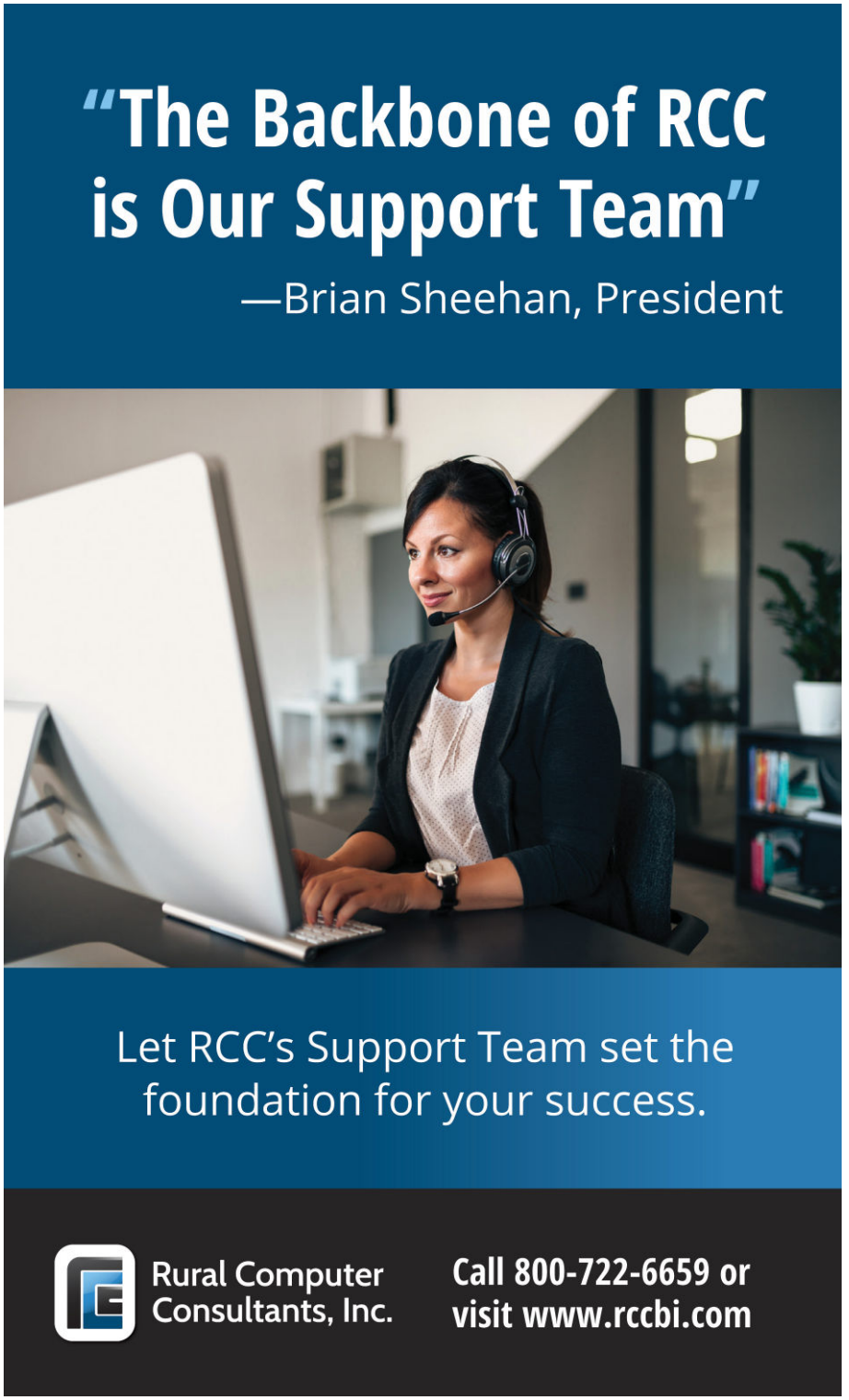
The explosion happened at 8:28 a.m. It is unclear, and may never be known, what ignited it. The LEAP building was reduced to rubble. Fire Captain Michael Bell died. Six other firefighters were injured, in varying degrees. Larry Lord received catastrophic injuries, but survived. He spent almost 7 months in Massachusetts General Hospital, as well as a rehabilitation center, in Boston before returning home.

QUESTIONS

Investigation revealed that propane leaked from the underground line near the building, and that the leak was caused by Techno Post's power auger, which tore it open. Many questions remain unanswered, including how the Techno Post crew could have missed the fact that its power auger had ruptured an intermediate pressure (presumably 10 psi) propane line before putting the bollard in the hole and backfilling it; and whether the propane tank was empty when the CN Brown deliveryman filled it.

Next month's column will explore the multiple investigations and consequences that have resulted from the Farmington explosion.

David Schlee is a shareholder in the Kansas City law firm of Schlee & McCarthy, P.C. Readers may contact him at drschlee@schleelaw.com.





WHERE'S THE FIRST DESTINATION YOU HAVE IN MIND WHEN TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS ARE LIFTED?

NANCY J. COOP

During the global pandemic and requirements to shelter-in-place/lock-down/quarantine, some of us have wondered what it will be like to roam from home, step out into the world, and reconnect live and in person with those we have missed. Here's an assortment of answers from our colleagues who are very well ready to "get out of town." From the simple to the extreme, these answers begin a journey towards dreams and living life safely and on our own terms.

The VERBATIM column presents open-ended questions to industry colleagues. Taken from a familiar "Heard on the Street" format, we offer our responders a chance to reply via email. What is offered below are their personal thoughts in response to the question above.

RESPONSES FROM THE WEST COAST TO THE MISSISSIPPI

We are going to Disneyland! At the beginning of the year, we set the date for April 25th. We also bought matching shirts to wear with "Disneyland 2020" imprinted on them. As a family we decided not to go until the mandatory face mask restriction is lifted. We will

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be wearing our shirts whenever we go, even if it is in another year. :)

Julie Johnson
Ted Johnson Propane
Baldwin Park, Calif.

My destination would be Clearwater Beach, Fla. This has been a very challenging year for everyone and beach therapy is exactly what my family and I need to get back to normal. The healing of the salt water and serenity of the sunsets is good for the soul.

Ed Varney
Rego Products
McKinney, Texas

We are fortunate because restrictions were lifted in our area in mid-May. Priority #1—haircuts! Priority #2—sitting down in a restaurant for chips, salsa, and tacos. We are also looking forward to a summer vacation, hopefully on a beach.

Jason Soulon
Westmor Industries
Shawnee, Kan.

For me, I'm going to Tanzania to hunt Cats. Hopefully COVID doesn't get in the way. That means I'll need to take all the meds with me just in case.

John Kamps
Kamps Propane
Manteca, Calif.

Chuck and Judy Kinnie are traveling to Portland, Maine, from Northern California the first of July to visit family. There is no quarantine requirement there. We had scheduled a cruise up the East Coast that was cancelled, so we're going to fly back.

Quarantine is when you restrict the movement of sick people.

Tyranny is when you restrict the movement of well people.

Chuck Kinnie
Shasta Gas Propane
Palo Cedro, Calif.

Wiesbaden, Germany. My son is stationed there and we love Germany. What a beautiful country. Plus we really miss him, his sweet wife, and our beautiful granddaughter.

T. Brad Duncan
Allaround Propane Inc.
Fruitland, N.M.

My first destination would be Southern California to reconnect with family and friends. COVID has reminded me that we are, indeed, mortal and that our time in this world is uncertain.

Dan Binning
Colorado and New Mexico
Propane Gas Associations
Arvada, Colo.

In the words of Johnny Cash, everywhere, man!

Reno, Chicago, Fargo, Minnesota, Buffalo, Toronto, Winslow, Sarasota, Wichita, Tulsa, Ottawa, Oklahoma, Tampa,



Panama, Mattawa, La Paloma, Bangor, Baltimore, Salvador, Amarillo, Tocopilla, Barranquilla, and Padilla, Boston, Charleston, Dayton, Louisiana, Washington, Houston, Kingston, Texarkana, Monterey, Faraday, Santa Fe, Tallapoosa, Glen Rock, Black Rock, Little Rock, Oskaloosa, Tennessee to Hennessey, Chicopee, Spirit Lake, Grand Lake, Devil's Lake, Crater Lake, Louisville, Nashville, Knoxville, Ombabika, Schefferville, Jacksonville, Waterville, Costa Rica, Pittsfield, Springfield, Bakersfield, Shreveport, Hackensack, Cadillac, Fond du Lac, Davenport, Idaho, Jellico, Argentina, Diamantina, Pasadena, Catalina, Pittsburgh, Parkersburg, Gravelbourg, Colorado, Ellensburg, Rexburg, Vicksburg, El Dorado, Larimore, Admore, Haverstraw, Chatanika, Chaska, Nebraska, Alaska, Opelaka, Baraboo, Waterloo, Kalamazoo, Kansas City, Sioux City, Cedar City, Dodge City!

I'm going everywhere!

Boyd H. McGathey
Energy Distribution Partners
Parkville, Mo.

The first destination I have in mind after restrictions really isn't a place, it's more like—anywhere that all of my friends and family can gather together. This includes all of my friends and family in the industry that I've spent the last 30 some years "gathering" with at trade shows, conventions, and board meetings for the various associations that I've had the privilege to be a member of. These are the things I've missed the most since the pandemic started and restrictions were put in place to keep us safe. I pray that everyone has kept themselves as safe as possible and also pray for those dear friends and family that we've lost due to the pandemic!

Milt Swenson
Westmor Industries
Morris, Minn.

RESPONSES FROM THE MISSISSIPPI TO THE EAST COAST

Honestly, I'm more of a U.S. traveler myself—or at least I used to be. I have always said we have so many beautiful places right here in the U.S. to see, visit and learn our own history. Sadly that seems to be changing. The one trip I was planning for this summer before the brakes were applied was a train trip that went across Canada and the upper part of the U.S. I think that would be my first go to trip. If I were to travel abroad, I hope to plan a trip to Italy someday and visit where my family came from outside of Naples.

Judy Taranovich
Proctor Gas
Proctor, Vt.

This one is easy! Down under! Australia and New Zealand!

Laurie Irish-Jones
Irish Propane
Buffalo, N.Y.



Since the first travel destination cancelled was a family weekend at The Great Wolf Lodge Water Park in Minnesota to have some indoor water fun at the end of winter, this Fourth of July at the lake with the family will provide me with a much greater appreciation of our cottage and the fun we have as a family at home. As I write this response, there is a lot of craziness in the larger cities, so for now my favorite destination is wherever I can be with my family—our seven grandchildren provide me the seven wonders of the world.

Gary France
France Propane Service
Schofield, Wis.

Our first destination once the restrictions are lifted is to go see the grandkids! We have a 4-month-old, a 2-month-old, and one due in 2 weeks and have had limited contact due to COVID. Beyond that, it will be nice to go see some customers and get back to some form of normalcy.

Tracy Timmerman
JARCO
Salem, Ill.

Now that summer is here, the first place I'd like to travel to is anywhere in northern Michigan with my family. You'd be hard-pressed to find a more beautiful destination from June through September. The trip "Up North" is worth it just for the smoked salmon and whitefish. If you've never had smoked fish from the Great Lakes, you're really missing out.

Don Montroy
Bergquist Inc.
Rockford, Mich.

We have always enjoyed traveling, whether it be to an NPGA event, a sporting event, or vacation. We did not have any definite travel plans in place this summer, other than several three- or four-day trips. All of those have been cancelled. We plan on returning to travel slowly, once things open back up. As of now, we are hoping to attend the NPGA Executive Board meeting in August as well as the NPGA Board Meeting in September. We are very excited and hopeful about a planned trip to Amsterdam next April—but only if it can be done safely!

Rosie Buschur
McMahan's Bottle Gas
Dayton, Ohio

Restrictions in Georgia are adjusted to 50 people. I will be going to my annual meeting at Barnsley Resort in Adairsville.

Jennifer McKeen
Georgia Propane Gas Association
Marietta, Ga.

My husband and I had a trip booked the first week in June to Sandals Emerald Bay in Great Exuma, Bahamas, and it was canceled of course. We were planning to celebrate our one year anniversary and my birthday. We are looking forward to attempting the trip

Continued on **Page 43**



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SOFTWARE FEATURES DELIVER CONVENIENCE, EFFICIENCY, AND MORE

STEVE RELYEA

There has been much talk about consumers and business owners adopting new technology during the pandemic. Two recent surveys offer data that backs that up.

Early in the COVID-19 outbreak, on March 27, the Consumer Technology Association (CTA) reported that American households were already adopting new tech solutions. In its "COVID-19 Impact Study: Use of Technology at Home," CTA said 26% of consumers were using new video streaming services for the first time; 42% were using social media platforms more often; and a quarter were purchasing non-food items online more often. More than a third had purchased tech devices over the past week to help them adjust to the new normal.

Accenture, too, found that the pandemic was accelerating digital adoption. In findings released May 4, the global professional services company reported that while 32% of consumers' current purchases of all products and services have been online, that figure is expected to rise to 37% post-outbreak. Accenture also found that more than half of respondents said they were likely to increase their usage of voice-enabled digital assistants, online recommendation apps, self-service apps, intelligent home devices, and wearables.

This move to digital has been true in the propane industry as well, several software vendors tell ***BPN***. There's been a trend in that direction for years, as consumers seek convenience and business owners seek efficiency. The challenges of the pandemic have sped that up, with the demands of touchless ways to do business.

BASE Engineering (Saint John, N.B., Canada) has added three new features to its ProControl3 Integrated Fuel Delivery System over the past year.

The ProControl3 (PC3) is a handheld device for drivers that features truck remote control and safety features as well as complete delivery system management. Alone, the handheld allows hose-end remote control of the pump, tank valves, engine RPM, hose reel, and emergency stop. With the BASEstation HUB, BASE Engineering's onboard computer hub, the PC3 can also record DOT pre-trip truck inspections, capture and display inventory levels on the truck, display an optimized customer delivery list, and perform several point-of-sale functions.

"The pandemic has sped the transition from paper to the cloud, off paper tickets and toward automation," says Laura Lunn, marketing coordinator. The three features added to PC3 over the past year include the following:

MEC Smart Interlock Integration: PC3 can now interface with MEC Smart Interlock devices on a truck. MEC Interlocks respond to such things as a door being latched or a hose nozzle being seated in its storage housing. Now, the PC3 displays a list of up to five of the interlocks and their status.

ProControl3 Enhanced Point of Sale: When interfaced to an electronic register, the PC3 now allows the operator to select products, meters, compartments, and set presets. When connected to an LCR, the system allows for full point-of-sale functionality from the PC3 handheld device.

ProControl3 Barcode Scanner: With this new barcode scanning feature, the PC3 illuminates and reads the barcode for identification of each vehicle or piece of equipment. So, the PC3 can

capture the volume delivered for each piece of equipment.

BASE Engineering reports that with the increased operator efficiency delivered by the PC3, its current customer base reports making one additional delivery per route. “At the end of the day, PC3 is about increasing efficiency,” Lunn says. “It’s about gaining efficiency, saving time, and keeping the driver at the end of the hose pumping propane.”



BASE Engineering

BASE Engineering and its parent company, Marshall Excelsior Co. (MEC), will soon launch a series of weekly webinars called MEC/BASE University.

For updates about the webinars, and additional information about the PC3, visit *www.baseng.com*.

Taurus Systems (Bowdoinham, Maine) provides back-office software solutions to the propane, fueloil, and service industries. The company promotes to customers that its software interfaces with several mobile truck companies and credit card processors.

“We like to focus on the fact that we are an open company; we work with a lot of partners,” says Robert Bertulli, president. “Customers like to have the freedom to choose their own credit card processors, mobile truck partners, and tank monitoring options. We will go in and work with most of the customer’s existing equipment.”

“A lot of companies are looking really hard at tank monitoring due to difficult customers, such as summer homes or other hard-to-gauge usage,” he adds. “They want to make the ideal drop. With our software, they can become very efficient and get paid faster.”

Taurus-Plus Propane Back Office Software offers unlimited drop locations, with unlimited tanks, tax, and price tables for each location. It also features check-off boxes for propane use for each tank; tank rentals; and flexible pricing options. The software allows the user to automatically schedule deliveries based on K-factors, monitored gallons, Julian calendar, or weekly route.

“Our price point is a little better than anyone else’s for what you get,” Bertulli says. “We don’t oversell. We have a software option that’s right for your team.”



Taurus Systems

“With the propane industry’s staff working remotely during the pandemic, payment systems are now more in use,” he adds. “My customers and the Taurus team have been very busy during the pandemic.”

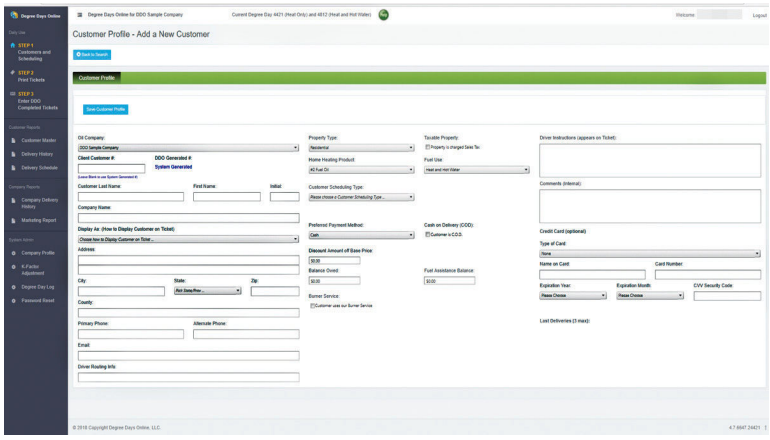
For more information, visit *www.taurus-plus.com*.

As someone whose father founded a fueloil delivery business in 1956 and whose brother owns one today, Steve Hill knows what a chore it can be to schedule deliveries. As a Microsoft certified software developer, he also knows how to come up with solutions.

Today, he and his brother, Bill Hill, are co-owners of **Degree Days Online LLC** (Manchester, Conn.), a company that provides fueloil and propane delivery management software. Steve serves as the software developer and Bill is the user liaison.

“I write the software for my brother,” Steve Hill tells ***BPN***. “I used to write it for my father, who owned a fueloil company since 1956, but passed away nine years ago. With what I have heard from them, I have made it easy to use, intuitive, and easy to learn.”

Degree Days Online (DDO) is cloud-based, subscription-based software that provides fueloil and propane delivery



Degree Days Online

companies a way to track customers and deliveries. DDO automates the delivery schedule and prints delivery tickets; gets the degree day data and makes calculations for each

customer; keeps track of outstanding balances; and can work with QuickBooks Online to help with accounting. “We generate invoices in QuickBooks,” Hill explains. “Customers love it, because they don’t have to do dual entry.”

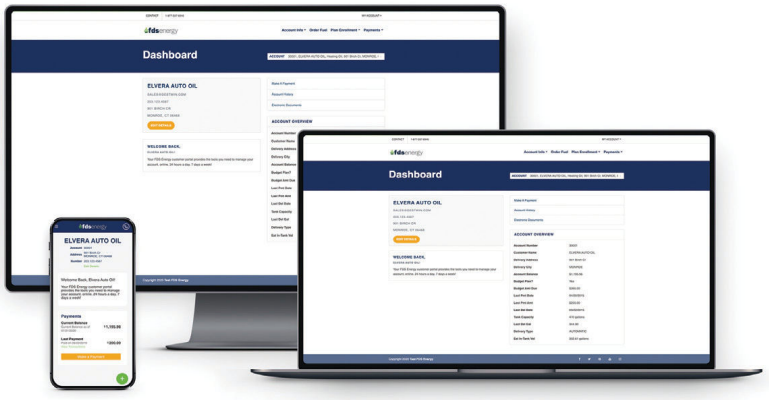
Because DDO is cloud-based, users can access it from anywhere, don’t need to install anything, don’t have to worry about updating the software, and don’t have to back up the data. Because DDO is subscription-based, it has a low initial cost and is affordable. DDO also has a mobile site for use on smartphones.

“We have seen a little bit of an influx of people coming to us because DDO is cloud-based and you can get at it from anywhere,” Hill says. “We have had calls from people who have in-office software, but want to change to the cloud.”

Hill reports that half of the new subscribers to DDO were using software that they were no longer happy with, and the other half had no software and were scheduling deliveries manually.

“DDO simplifies lives and saves hours of time,” Hill concludes. “During the winter, my brother used to write out 60 to 70 delivery tickets every evening after a long day. Now, DDO prints them out, along with driver instructions and directions.”

For more information, visit *www.degreedaysonline.com*.



Destwin Energy Systems

Destwin Energy Systems (Sandy Hook, Conn.) offers two solutions for fuel dealers that enable their customers to do business with them online. One is the Destwin Fuel Dealer Solution (FDS), a cloud-based e-commerce system that integrates back-office data with a customer web portal. The second is the Destwin Connect Mobile App, an extension of the Destwin Customer Portal.

FDS allows a fuel dealer’s customers to view their account information and transaction history, pay bills, order fuel, enter price protection programs, review and update their contact information, and sign up for programs such as paperless billing and autopay programs—all online. “It allows customers to do business with the fuel dealer without the need for a phone call or office visit,” says Robert Kulawiec, chief operating officer. “The portal provides 24/7 access.”

FDS connects to the dealer’s back-end system for the account information it displays in the portal. “It’s not just a tool to pay a bill or order fuel. It interacts with the back-end system, receiving data from and sending data to it, increasing the efficiency of the fuel dealer’s business processes.”

With FDS, fuel dealers can also create and manage content called Marketing Messages within the portal that can be targeted to specific groups of users based on individual account characteristics. As an example, a will call account might see one message while an automatic delivery account could see a completely different message.

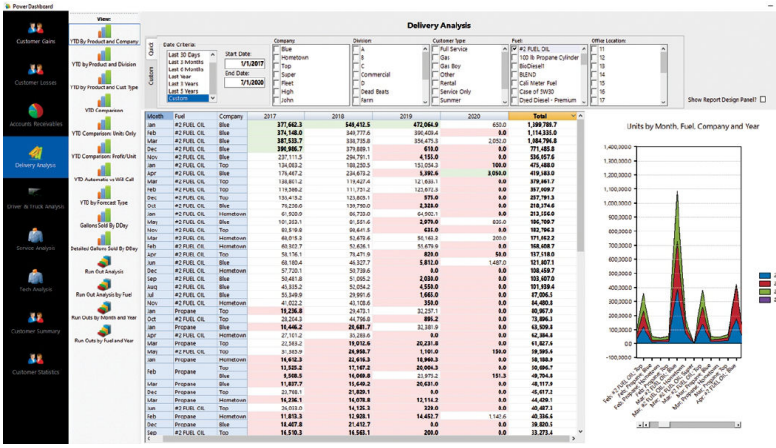
“We also interface with other third-party systems like document providers, tank monitors, and chat providers. The ability to interface with third-party service providers is an important aspect of FDS,” Kulawiec adds. “We can interface to different service providers or programs enhancing the customer user experience and adding features for the fuel dealer. We also interface to many gateways to accommodate our clients’ current and possible future gateway provider options.”

The Destwin Connect Mobile App is an extension of the portal. The app is individually branded with the fuel dealer’s colors and logo to provide a seamless transition between the portal and the client’s corporate site. Once published, the app is available for download from the App and Play stores and can be added to the consumer’s home screen, making access even easier and more convenient to use.

For more information, visit *www.destwinenergy.com*.

Blue Cow Software (Lynnfield, Mass.) updates its software products year-round, but the company planned to introduce two significant product enhancements at this year’s trade shows. Although the shows ended up being postponed, the product enhancements have been rolled out.

One is a “system check” functionality that analyzes the customer’s database and highlights any anomalies. It reviews every aspect of the customer’s database including information about customers, employees, forecasting, and trucks. When you set up a new account, did you leave out some necessary information? Has a ticket been created for a service job or fuel delivery, but the job hasn’t been done? Is there a truck license or an employee certification that is overdue? The system check looks at over 50 functions like these that could



Blue Cow Software

be possible action items and highlights them for the management team to act on.

“This came out at the perfect time,” says Nick Quaratiello, vice president of operations. “During the pandemic, with

many office people working from home, there may have been less communication when performing daily tasks in the office. The system check functionality is a great tool to help our customers improve their business operations."

The second major product enhancement was done in the Ignite Analytics product. A new "power dashboard" was created to present valuable operational reporting capabilities on every aspect of a fuel dealer's business.

"The new power dashboard gives the management team a great new way to view how their business is performing," Quaratiello explains. "It provides the data necessary to monitor your company's overall health in an easy, customizable format."

These enhancements are part of Blue Cow Software's suite of integrated software products for the propane and fueloil industry. The products include a management software package; a real-time communication tool for drivers and technicians; a customer portal website and phone app that allows customers and staff to conduct business anywhere; a business intelligence tool; and a tool for scanning and saving documents.

"Working from home during the pandemic wasn't a big shock for our customers as the Ignite suite of products are already designed to handle this type of situation and was one less stumbling block for our customers," Quaratiello concludes.

For more information, visit *www.bluecowsoftware.com*.

Consumers want to shop online, even for fuel. There's been a trend toward e-commerce in this industry for five years, and the pandemic has accelerated it. So says Mark Stillman, senior vice president and co-founder of **Energy Engine LLC** (Stroudsburg, Pa.).

"Ordering fuel is no different from anything else; customers expect to be able to do it online," he notes. "They actually do want to shop as they do for a phone or on Amazon."

"Now we're in a digital-only world," he adds. "Fuel dealers are seeing COVID turn fuel consumers into someone who wants to shop on their phone—not call, not visit. This has made dealers move faster toward e-commerce."

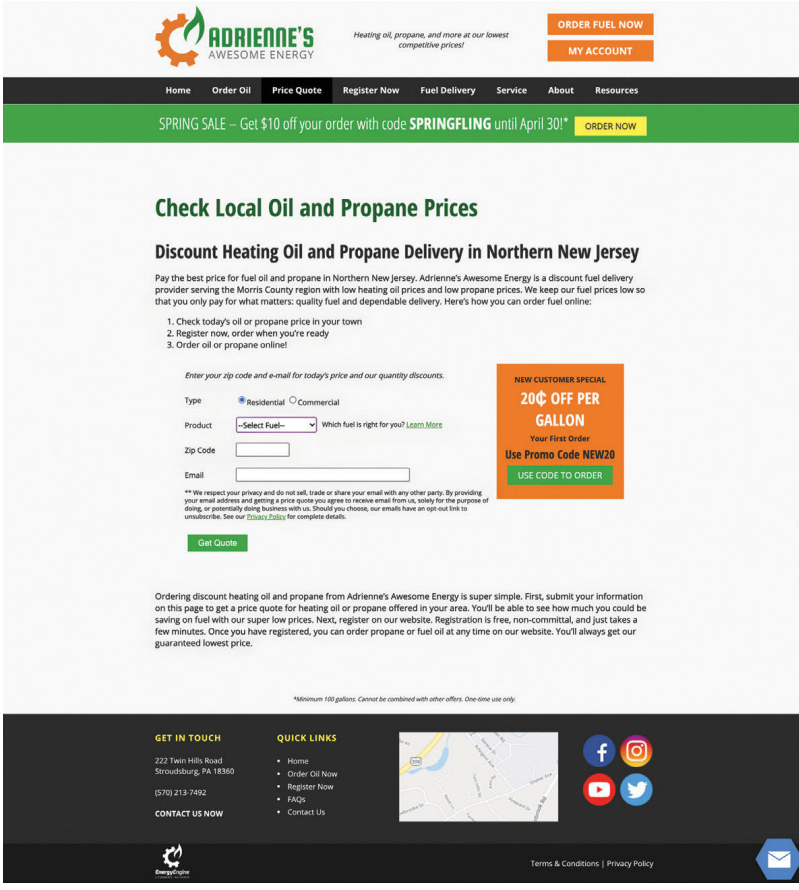
Energy Engine's solution for fuel dealers is a web-based e-commerce platform designed to serve the unique requirements of heating oil, propane, commercial fuels, and related energy product sales. This is not a portal designed only to allow existing customers to pay their bills, Stillman explains; it is a "full-journey e-commerce system that lives behind the dealer's website."

Like Amazon or other e-commerce sites, the Energy Engine communicates with the customer in an automated way. Consumers can register and log in; view online pricing; place online orders and receive e-mail confirmation; make online payments; receive email and text alerts regarding their delivery day; and receive email confirmation when the delivery is complete.

When a fuel dealer is ready to add the e-commerce platform, they need only provide their branded look and feel and their business rules. Energy Engine does the rest. The look and feel provided by the dealer includes logos and other materials that are used on their website. The business rules include things like prices, zip codes serviced, and additional products sold.

"Our onboarding is not a pain at all; dealers have fun," Stillman reports. "They never thought they'd be in e-commerce, but now they're selling appliances online and thinking about search engine optimization."

"What we would tell a dealer most of all is, we're now living in



Energy Engine LLC

a world where the consumer comes first," he concludes. "We have to focus on consumers and think about what they want. Online ordering has become ubiquitous; when consumers don't get it, they get frustrated."

For more information, visit *www.energyengineus.com*.

ADD Systems (Flanders, N.J.) does a major update to its software solutions every year, adding between 200 and 400 enhancements. This year's updates are useful at any time, but have proven to be especially valuable during the pandemic.

"Clients were already adopting new technology for efficiency, but in the last couple of months, during COVID, they have reached out to us to install additional solutions," John Coyle, vice president of sales, tells ***BPN***.

ADD Systems' software solutions for propane marketers include a back-office system, a browser-based user interface for staff, self-service portals for customers, a business intelligence solution, a mobile computing solution for delivery drivers, a mobile computing solution for service technicians,

an integrated business intelligence reporting engine, and a process automation tool.

One of the latest updates is an enhanced communication module that handles e-mail blasts and texts to customers. One common problem this solves is the customer who calls multiple times in a day to see when their delivery will arrive. With this module, they will be automatically notified when their delivery is expected and again when it was completed. “An informed customer is a happy customer,” Coyle notes. “Plus, this allows CSRs to focus on other areas.” During the pandemic, this module has also helped inform customers about the COVID-related protocols being used during deliveries and service calls. “Our clients report getting high marks from their customers for keeping them informed.”

Another recent enhancement is an additional business intelligence tool. This is designed to cure the “paralysis by analysis” that some businesses can suffer when facing all the data that is available today. With the new Atlas Alerts Reporting tool, problems are highlighted so that the business can focus on

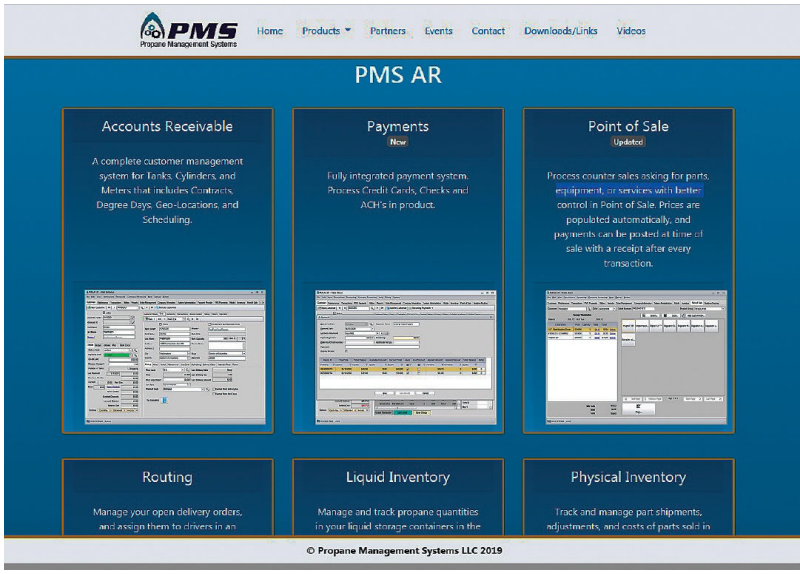


ADD Systems

targeting them. The user can define what is in tolerance and what is not. Then, rather than showing everything, this tool will display only what is not. “For example, you can have it show deliveries that are less than 60% capacity,” Coyle explains. “Then you can look at those deliveries. Did we make this delivery because we were in the area? Was it a vacation home, so we should put a tank monitor on it? Because Atlas shows only where the problems are, you can see them faster and solve them.” If a user does prefer to see regular updates, they can set up a subscription that they can quickly glance at to see that all is in tolerance.

“We pride ourselves on continuing to evolve the products,” Coyle concludes. “We saw where the market was heading, and then COVID sped things up. We expect that, post-COVID, marketers will have some employees continue to work from home. With our solutions, people working in the field or at home have access to all the information they would have in the office.”

For more information, visit *addsys.com.*



Propane Management Systems

Propane Management Systems (PMS; Paducah, Ky.) offers two products that are backed with unlimited tech support for one flat annual fee.

One is PMS Accounts Receivable (AR), a complete customer management system for tanks, cylinders, and meters that includes contracts, degree days, geo-locations, and scheduling. This product also features a fully integrated payment system; a point-of-sale system; a routing package; a liquid inventory package; a physical inventory package; tank monitor integration; cylinder integration; and tank propane usage meter integration.

The second product is PMS Mobile, which features rugged propane and cylinder delivery truck tablets that provide greater control and automation of deliveries.

Both products are backed by unlimited tech support for one flat annual fee.

“People like us best for our service,” says Warren Van Wyck, general manager. “We answer the phone 24/7 and they don’t pay for phone calls. Most of the time, people call to ask about how to do something they haven’t done in a long time. Our package has a lot of stuff. If they don’t use part of it initially, but then want to use it later, they call to ask about it.”

The two products also communicate in real time. “When you enter a customer or a payment in AR, the drivers in the field see it instantly. When you create routing or check off deliveries, that is instant too.”

“Most people realize technology can help them, especially with COVID. It’s a way to eliminate contact,” Van Wyck adds.

“If you are thinking of doing a system, you should check all your options,” he concludes. “We don’t get beat on service or price. Beyond the obvious price, what kind of price are you looking at if you make a call for tech support six months from now? We answer the phone and we don’t charge for that.”

Visit *www.propanemanagementsystems.com* for more information.

A new embedded reporting tool is the latest addition to **Cargas Energy** (Lancaster, Pa.) software for propane dealers. The Advanced Reporting & Dashboard module helps fuel dealers understand their business performance, spot trends or anomalies, and quickly respond to changes—all without leaving Cargas Energy software.

"Before, we had static reports; now, we have an embedded tool that provides actionable insights that help marketers make decisions based on their most current data," explains Dennis DiSabatino, Jr., vice president of the Cargas Energy business unit. "This helps marketers make decisions on a daily basis about deliveries and service."

"The advanced reporting functionality is an easier way to filter and drill down into data," adds Brian Weit, manager of marketing. "While the dashboards put key performance indicators at your fingertips."

Cargas Energy software is browser-based, so it can be accessed from anywhere, on any device. That has proven valuable during the pandemic.

"Our technology platform has allowed our customers to thrive in this situation," DiSabatino says. "Cargas Energy started from day one as a mobile technology platform. Our customers have leveraged that—there's no need for people to touch and process paper."

Cargas Energy found marketers moving in that direction anyway in a survey it conducted last year. In its inaugural "Top Technology Trends in Fuel Delivery Benchmarking Report," the company surveyed fuel dealers and found that 31% were storing data on cloud servers; more than 50% were looking at tank monitors as a future investment; more than 40% were



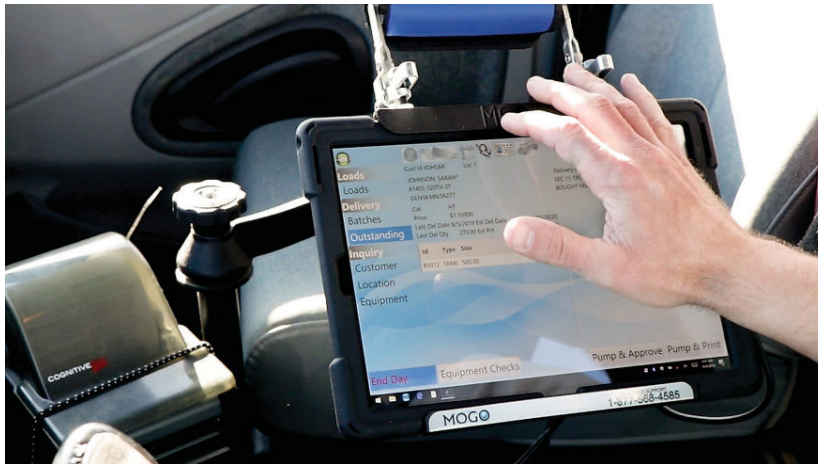
Cargas Energy

looking at customer web portals and mobile apps; and 75% said a cloud or web platform plays an important role when evaluating new software.

"It will be interesting to see how the pandemic impacts the results in 2021," Weit notes.

"We're here to help the industry," DiSabatino concludes. "We've implemented secure tools to support your implementation remotely. We urge companies to adopt the cloud technologies that are out there to support remote work in this situation."

For more information about Cargas Energy software, visit *https://cargasenergy.com/*. The "Top Technology Trends in Fuel Delivery Benchmarking Report" can be downloaded at *https://cargasenergy.com/blog/top-technology-trends-in-fuel-delivery/*.



Rural Computer Consultants

Rural Computer Consultants (RCC; Bird Island, Minn.) was planning to introduce two new products at this year's trade shows. Both of these products are modules that can be added to their Fuel Distribution System (FDS), a software package for the fuel and propane industry that can be customized with more than 20 modules.

The first module is E-Commerce +. "We already had e-commerce, but this is bigger," says Freddie Ridler, sales. With this module, customers can opt in to receive text or email notifications based on many different scenarios with FDS. This includes when a delivery is on its way, when a delivery has been completed, when a payment has been made, when invoices are due, as well as many other notifications.

RCC has also partnered with DocuSign to begin handling forms. "This really took off the last three or four months with all of the shutdowns," Ridler notes. "Yes, the propane business has been open, but offices have been closed."

The second module is Dispatch Manager (DM). This takes the role of a dispatcher by building loads, mapping, and optimizing deliveries. DM sends this information to drivers so a dispatcher no longer has to give tickets or text them. It does this for all types of delivering—fuel delivery, service, and cylinder delivery. DM also keeps managers informed about where the drivers are and how much inventory is left.

Ridler himself was scheduled to deliver a talk at the NPGA Expo about CRM tools. "Long story short, this means texting," he explains. "People always have their phone with them, so texting notifications are the hot commodity right now. When it beeps, you grab your phone and look." For propane customers, useful text notifications include where the driver is, when the next payment is due, and when a payment has been submitted.

RCC's FDS and its Mobile Office On the Go (MOGO; a mobile workstation for drivers and service technicians) have helped keep customers and employees safe during the pandemic. "Five or six years ago, we started adding cloud hosting, which gives our customers access to our virtual server so they can log in, access their data, and work from home," Ridler notes.

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APP BOOSTS CUSTOMER CONVENIENCE, MARKETER EFFICIENCY

STEVE RELYEA

When Proulx Oil & Propane (Newmarket, N.H.) saw that half their customers were doing business with them over mobile phones, the company decided to make that contact even easier. The provider of propane, fuel oils, and equipment contacted the provider of its e-commerce system and invested in an app.

In mid-June, the Proulx Oil & Propane Mobile App was officially launched. Now, with just a tap on their phone or tablet, customers can make payments, view their transaction history, order fuel, view delivery history, manage tank locations, see their current price plans, and request service.

"We realized that our customers were increasingly looking to do business with us over their mobile phones and this application gave us an all-new way to get closer to them," Maribeth Girard, marketing assistant at Proulx Oil & Propane, told ***BPN***.

The app was developed by Destwin Energy Systems (Sandy Hook, Conn.), which had already provided the e-commerce system that integrates Proulx's back-office data with its customer web portal. The Destwin Connect Mobile App is a seamless extension of the Destwin Customer Portal. The app is customized and branded for Proulx; it includes Proulx's app icon, splash screen, Google Play feature image, and a Google Play promo video. It is available for both IOS and Android devices.

"The app puts our products and services directly in the palms of our customers," Girard noted. "We feel this is an important tool in today's competitive market to grow sales, acquire new customers, and help with customer retention. We want to meet and exceed customer expectations and feel that this is the best way to help bring digital best practices to our marketing, customer service, and sales approaches."

TREND TOWARD MOBILE

Proulx decided to invest in the app after monitoring and seeing that between 45% and 50% of its customers were using mobile phones to do business with the company. "When I do e-blasts through Constant Contact, on average 53% of our customers are opening the email on their phone," Girard reported. She then sent Destwin logos, a video link, and some branding info, and Destwin took it from there.

"The app is a separate item that we sell," said Robert Kulawiec, chief operating officer of Destwin Energy Systems. "The dealer provides their logo and other proprietary assets that we use to build the app so it is branded as their app in the App and Play stores."

Destwin has been selling portals for 13 years and apps for two years. Today, many fuel dealers that are new customers choose to implement both a portal and an app. Kulawiec said an app installation typically takes four to eight weeks.

Kulawiec added that there is no one thing that triggers a fuel

dealer to add an app, but there has been a definite trend toward app use by both dealers and consumers. As with any new technology, there are early adopters, then general adopters, and then laggards who begin using it. “Everybody has been a little different, but app usage is continuing to grow. Today’s younger generation uses their phone to access the web and internet even more than a computer. As they get older and become the customers of fuel dealers, the demand for the app will continue to grow.”

If a fuel dealer already has a customer portal and then adds an app, customers who are using the portal are the ones most likely to begin using the app. If a company introduces a portal and an app at the same time, customers who sign up are just as likely to use the app as the portal. Customers who are less technically inclined are likely to continue to interact with the fuel dealer through phone calls.

The coronavirus may have an effect too. “People are more likely to do business remotely,” Kulawiec noted. “By implementing an app, a fuel dealer can make it more convenient to do business with them.”

WHEREVER, WHENEVER CONVENIENT

“The fuel dealer doesn’t particularly care which the customer uses—the portal or the app—but the app is more convenient for the customer,” he added. “Their phone travels with them wherever they go, so they can do business from anywhere at any time. They don’t need a computer or internet access to use the app. They can use either one, whenever it’s most convenient.”

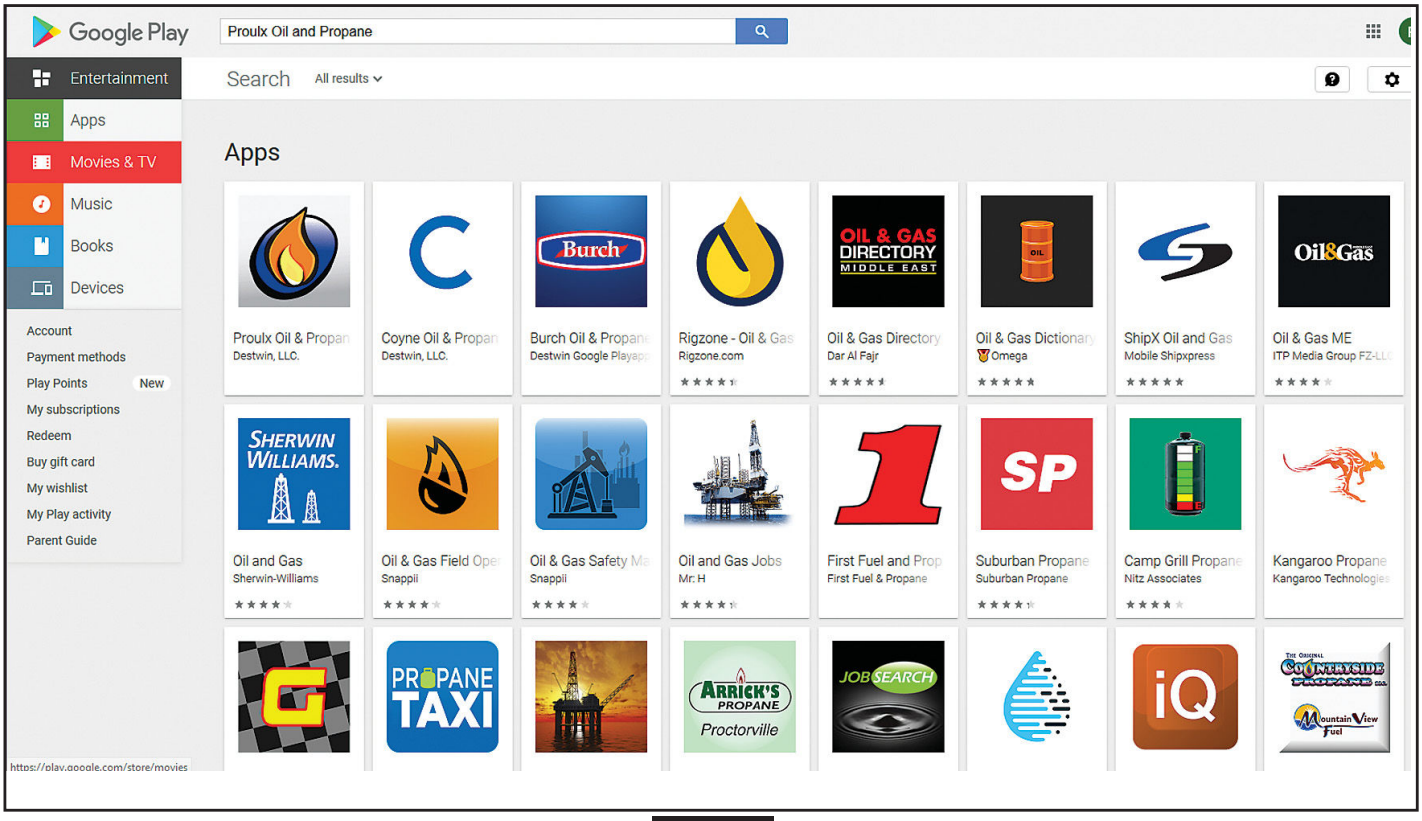
Once fuel dealers have an app, they tend to use every opportunity to let customers know that it’s available. They promote the app on their website, in printed documents that are sent to customers, in direct mailings, in recorded messages on the phone, and when CSRs are talking with customers.



“It is absolutely worth it to take every opportunity to say the app exists,” Kulawiec said. “The app travels with you wherever you go, it sits on your home screen like Uber or your bank’s app, and it lets you contact your fuel dealer with one touch.”

When asked who she expects will be the first customers to begin using the new Proulx App, Girard answered, “I think it will be those customers already using the portal. We still do have a good amount of an older demographic that pay by check or call in credit card payment.”

“The app makes it even easier for customers to do business with us and surpasses expectations for customer service and convenience,” she concluded. “It also unburdens our staff from routine matters and customer requests to boost operational efficiency.” ■



OFF-ROAD BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IS FOCUS OF NEW PERC DIRECTOR

PAT THORNTON

Concrete cutters, forklifts, and commercial lawn mowers are three opportunities for propane that will be promoted by the new director of off-road business development at the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC). Matt McDonald, who joined PERC in May, will lead research and development and training projects with a focus on new product development and communication strategy and outreach.

"I always have had an eye for opportunities for propane," McDonald said. "An example would be large buildings going in where a lot of concrete is a major component in the building process. Propane is a perfect fuel for the process of cutting concrete in areas that are often enclosed. A fuel with very few emissions is best for the health of employees in this situation."

A general manager at Ferrellgas for nearly six years, he also served as an aircrew survival equipment man in the United States Navy for four years. For McDonald, who was happy in his role at Ferrellgas, the description of the role at PERC just jumped out at him as something he absolutely wanted to do. "I am grateful for the opportunity to lead this market and excited for the new challenge. I know I am joining forces with an incredible team here at PERC and am eager to dive in and get started."



"Matt's passion for the industry, paired with his existing experience and expertise, made him a great fit for this position," said PERC president and CEO Tucker Perkins. "We have no doubt he will be a great addition to the PERC team and look forward to watching him expand propane use in the off-road market in new, innovative ways."

"Noticing opportunities for propane is key to Matt's role," said Cinch Munson, PERC's senior vice president, business development. "He comes to us with a mindset already in place of looking for the many, many opportunities where propane can bring value in the off-road market. The machines and engines to cut concrete are one of many options where we can expand propane's market share."

FOCUS ON FORKLIFTS

"Matt joins us at a critical time," Munson added. "Priorities for PERC in 2020 through 2022 in our strategic plan include a heavy focus on forklifts and material handling. We need to continue to innovate to be successful in this long-standing market." He pointed to two key projects PERC is currently working on. "One is a retrofit exhaust treatment which lowers emissions on a forklift to nearly zero. Another is an ongoing project to create a hybrid forklift which runs on both electricity and propane. We continue to improve our case for propane with new engines and forklifts that fit evolving needs in the marketplace. We are cost-effective and environmentally friendly."

Munson noted that material handling in warehouses, many of which have smaller and smaller aisles for moving around, demands smaller, nimbler machines to navigate the workspace. He feels that it is critical to have fewer emissions to keep those in the warehouse from breathing them in constantly.

"The hybrid forklift concept is very intriguing to many who use forklifts," McDonald explained. "With electric batteries required to run forklifts often needing to charge, a propane system can be in place to keep the batteries charged while the forklift keeps running without stopping to recharge. The fueling of the forklift with propane requires very little time. It is designed to just pop an empty tank off and replace it with a full propane tank." Size, length of shifts, and how the forklifts operate are key factors to the best type of forklift and best energy to utilize, according to McDonald and Munson.

"As propane engine technology has improved, new options for lifts include Class 7 lifts that have typically run on diesel fuel,"

Continued on **Page 37**

NEW DIRECTOR BRINGS ENERGY AGENCY EXPERIENCE TO PERC

PAT THORNTON

Using propane in fuel cells, developing commercial applications for lowering NOx and particulate matter (PM) emissions, creating combined heat and power (CHP) solutions for residential applications, promoting propane as a marine fuel to lower carbon emissions in the world's waterways, and enacting carbon capture processes to eliminate carbon dioxide. These are all subjects Dr. Gokul Vishwanathan has either studied or worked on to develop real-life solutions. They are all areas of interest as the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) plots its 2020-22 Strategic Plan. Vishwanathan recently joined PERC as director of research and sustainability.

"We're happy to bring Gokul on board," said Cinch Munson, PERC's senior vice president, business development. "His experience really fits our strategic priorities and what we need to accomplish. Renewable propane, on-road and off-road applications, engine growth opportunities, energy storage, fuel cells, and carbon capture are all key areas we are focused on and Gokul has experience with all of them. He comes in with relationships already built with a lot of experts, and those relationships are very important." Vishwanathan, a mechanical engineer, joined PERC on May 18 and leads PERC initiatives to grow propane demand through research, technology development, and sustainability programs. He received a master's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Alabama and a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from the University of Wisconsin—Madison.

WIDE DOE EXPERIENCE

Prior to joining PERC, Vishwanathan worked for Booz Allen Hamilton, where he supported the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E) and the Advanced Manufacturing Office (AMO) of the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) agency as a technical advisor and subject matter expert in connected and automated vehicles, powertrain development including both conventional reciprocating engines and hybrid electric vehicles, CHP, thermal energy storage, and carbon capture technology.

He was a technical specialist at Cummins heading medium-duty and heavy-duty diesel engine development work and advancing novel fuel and air-path calibration mechanisms for diesel engines.

"During the time I worked for the DOE, I worked on various programs focusing on the development of internal combustion engines, hybrid-electric vehicles, thermal energy storage, and carbon capture solutions," Vishwanathan said. "At Cummins, I spent three and a half years doing diesel engine development work." Discussing carbon capture, he described it as a process of capturing carbon dioxide emissions, usually from large sources, such as a cement factory or a powerplant, and transporting it to a site and depositing it where it will not enter the atmosphere.

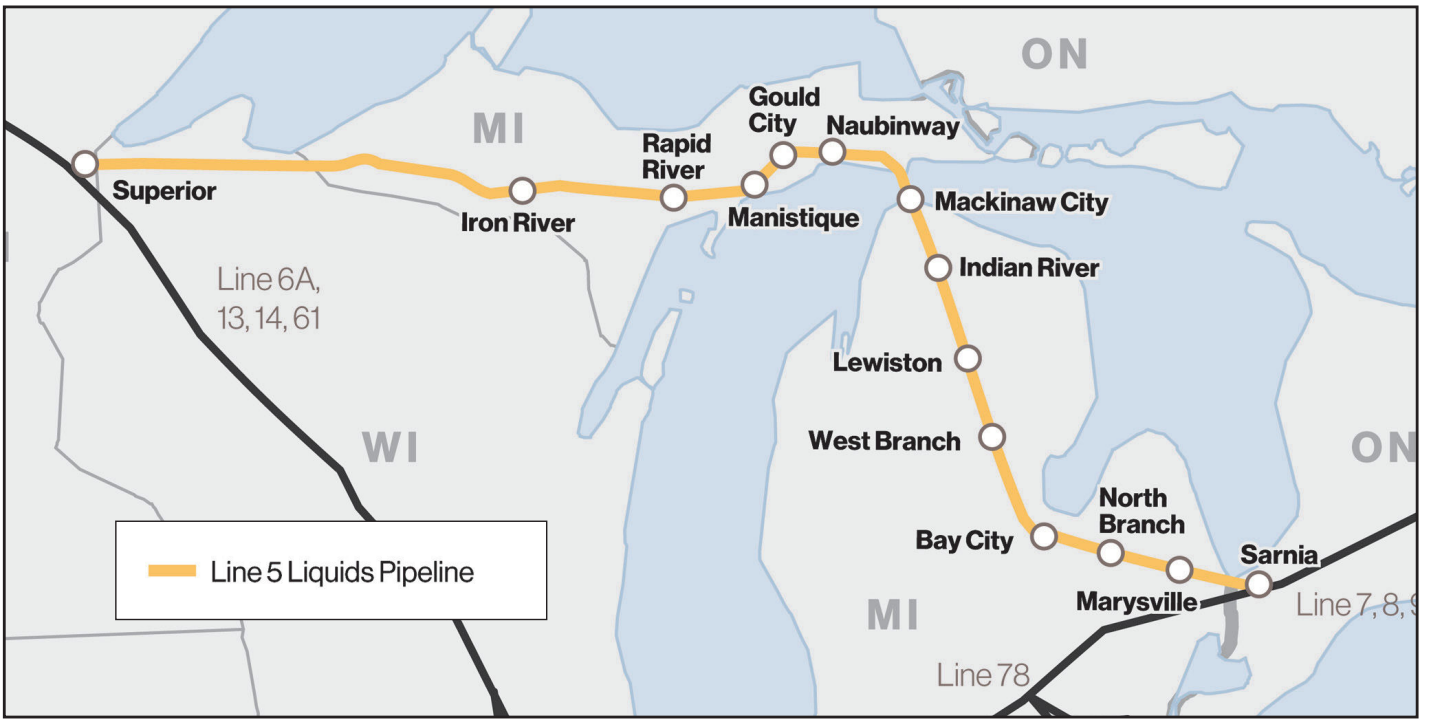
PREVIOUS CONTACT WITH PERC

In the process of working at DOE, Vishwanathan came to know Greg Kerr, who was PERC's director of research and development at the time, and through some mutual projects, he learned about PERC and some of its efforts to generate new uses for propane. "PERC has been looking at a lot of new uses for propane that will increase demand. The role of director of research and sustainability piqued my interest."

"I don't believe propane is just a 'bridge fuel,'" Vishwanathan explained. "It has so many ways it can be a long-term solu-

Continued on **Page 37**





Graphics courtesy Enbridge Energy

ENBRIDGE LINE 5 PARTIALLY CLOSED AMID CONTINUED STUDY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

PAT THORNTON

Since 2017, there has been intense focus on Enbridge Energy's Line 5 pipeline, originally constructed in 1953, which according to Enbridge is a 645-mile, 30-in.-diameter pipeline that begins in Superior, Wis., travels through Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsulas, and terminates in Sarnia, Ont., Canada. As it travels under the Straits of Mackinac, Line 5 splits into two 20-in.-diameter, parallel pipelines that are buried onshore and taper off deep underwater, crossing the Straits west of the Mackinac Bridge for a distance of 4.5 miles. The concern of a pipeline leak in the Straits has had many Michigan government officials, environmental groups, and Native Americans pushing for permanent closure of Enbridge Line 5. A plan is in the works for a tunnel for the pipeline underneath the lake bed which could be completed by 2024. Much study and approval are still needed.

For the propane gas industry, closure of Enbridge Line 5 would cut off 55% of the propane that reaches Michigan, always one of the top three propane-consuming states in the U.S. In addition, all surrounding states would be impacted as well due to the tremendous amount of propane that ultimately lands in those states. "We all know there are simply not enough trucks and drivers to supply Michigan with propane in the event Line 5 were closed," Derek Dalling, executive director of the Michigan Propane Gas Association (MPGA) told ***BPN***. "Rail lines are not where they need to be to meet demand either, especially in the high demand winter months." Dalling is also executive director of the Ohio Propane Gas Association and deputy executive director of the Indiana Propane Gas Association, two more states that would be severely impacted by a loss of supply from Line 5.

"We have been watching this issue with great interest especially due to its impact on New York as well as the many other states where it could affect pricing and availability of product," said Bruce Whitney, executive director of the New York Propane Gas Association (NYPGA). "With potential interruptions to Sarnia, Ont., and other distribution points, we have great interest in product availability in Western and Central New York. As always, we advise our members to keep in close contact with their trusted suppliers and transporters and make the best decisions for their companies. If there ever was a time to consider adding more storage, this may be it."

SHUTDOWNS OF LINE 5 IN JUNE

"This has been our biggest focus for the past several weeks," Jeff Petrash, vice-president and general counsel of the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA), told ***BPN***. "The lat-

est concerns stem from a report by Enbridge that something pulled one of the pipeline support anchors of the east leg out of position. It was also discovered that mussels on the west leg had been dislodged, indicating an impact of some sort." Enbridge shut down both legs initially on June 18 but then reopened the west leg two days later after consultation with the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). Both determined damage was limited to the east leg, and, as a result the west leg remained open.

On June 25, a complete shutdown of Line 5 was ordered by Circuit Court Judge James Jamo after Michigan's Attorney General Dana Nessel requested a temporary restraining order. Four hours of oral argument took place from the state and Enbridge with regard to the Attorney General's request asking the court to stop Enbridge from operating Line 5 while Michigan regulators review information provided by the pipeline. "The judge ruled July 1 the east leg needed to remain shut down until PHMSA could complete its investigation of damage," Petrash said. "The west leg could restart to conduct an 'in-line investigation' (ILI) and 'may continue to operate thereafter subject to the results of the ILI and further Order of the Court.'" At the time of the ruling, Vern Yu, Enbridge's executive vice president and president of Liquids Pipelines, said, "Inspections have determined that the west segment of Line 5 crossing the Straits is safe for operations and which PHMSA did not object to restarting; we had shut down the east segment of the pipeline pending review of a disturbance that was discovered on one of the screw anchors and an assessment of the east leg's fitness for service."

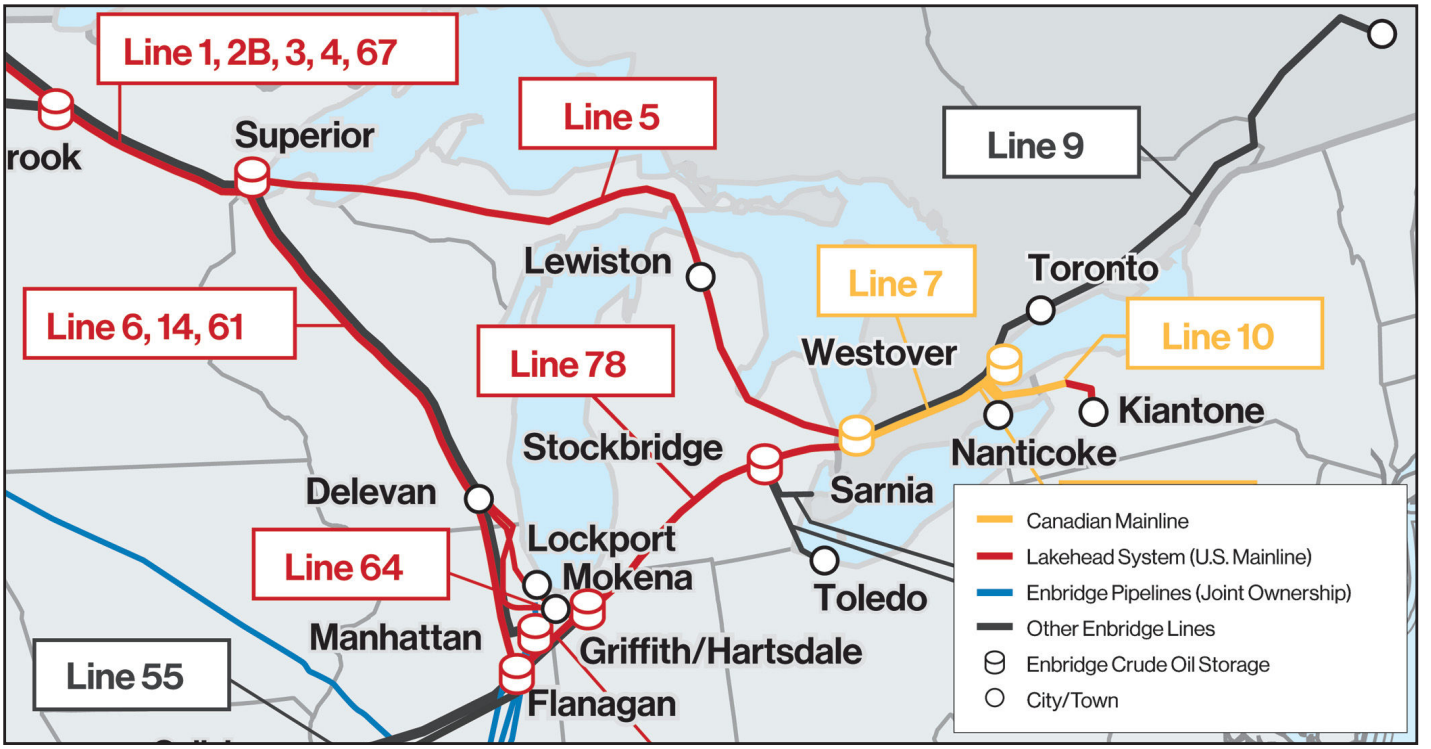
On July 8, an Enbridge press release stated, "Enbridge has now submitted to the Michigan Circuit court and to the State the results of our inspection of the area of interest on the west segment of Line 5. The inspection, using an inline inspection tool, found no internal or external metal loss or dents. This test reconfirms that the west leg of the pipeline is safe to operate."

"If there's good news, it is that this didn't happen in December or January," said MPGA's Dalling. "Also, the quick reopening of the west leg means the judge felt the west line was safe." As of July 15, the east leg remained closed and the cause of damage to it some 220 to 240 feet under water remains a mystery. "There will be a review of ships that have come through the Straits in the past year," Petrash said. "It is not clear what vessel would have come through dragging something that low that could have caused that level of damage."

A 10-YEAR HISTORY OF CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

June 30 also brought a development regarding a tunnel that Enbridge and many stakeholders see as the most cost-effective and environmentally responsible resolution to Enbridge Line 5 concerns. The Michigan Public Service Commission rejected Enbridge's request for a declaratory order that the commission's original 1953 permit would allow Enbridge to construct a new $500-million tunneled pipeline beneath the Strait of Mackinac. The tunnel is projected to be completed in 2024. The commission ordered a hearing to be completed and briefed within 10 months. On July 7, a website was introduced by the State of Michigan, *Michigan.gov/Line5*, to keep the public informed about Enbridge Energy's proposal to build the tunnel beneath the lake bed.

To fully understand the processes leading to the plan of building a tunnel for the pipeline, one must go back at least 10 years to an incident in Michigan in 2010. According to the new Line 5 website, an oil spill from Line 6B owned by Enbridge in a tributary of the Kalamazoo River near Marshall, Mich., was a key event that initially got public attention regarding the potential for severe damage from an oil leak or spill. On July 25, 2010, 843,000 gallons of oil flowed directly into the Talmadge Creek, a tributary that carried oil into the Kalamazoo River. This river is a Lake Michigan tributary and the oil was ultimately contained 80 miles from Lake Michigan. The State of Michigan and Enbridge entered into a $75-million Consent



Demand on Enbridge pipelines (approximate)

Line	Kbpd	US gallons per day
Line 5 (including NGL)	500	21,000,000
Line 78	480	19,740,000
Total	**970**	**40,740,000**

Capacity of Enbridge pipelines

Line	Kbpd	US gallons per day
Line 5	540	22,680,000
Line 78	570	23,940,000
Line 78 (ex-Stockbridge)	502	21,084,000

Judgment in May 2015. In July 2016, there was a Consent Decree between Enbridge and the federal government to resolve claims related to the Marshall spill. Enbridge agreed to pay $110 million on spill prevention and pipeline operations in the Great Lakes region and a $61-million fine. Cleanup efforts are ongoing and are estimated at more than $1 billion.

The Marshall pipeline spill led to the creation of the Michigan Petroleum Pipeline Task Force with the mandate to look closer at pipelines transporting petroleum products around the state, and especially Line 5. The creation of the Pipeline Safety Advisory Board (PSAB) led to oversight of two independent analyses of Line 5, an alternatives analysis looking at the feasibility of other forms of transportation to handle the same amount of product that moves through Line 5, and a risk analysis of the potential financial impact of a worst-case spill to determine the final assurance amount as required under the 1953 easement. The alternatives report was provided in June 2017 and the risk analysis was provided in August 2018.

In April 2018, Line 5 was damaged in the Straits by a boat anchor that was dragged along the lake bottom. Three dents were caused to the pipeline, two on the western segment and one on the eastern segment, raising concerns about just how vulnerable the pipeline was to future anchor strikes. The portion of the Straits with pipelines were declared "No Anchor" zones.

INITIAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN ENBRIDGE AND MICHIGAN

In November 2017, an agreement between the state of Michigan and Enbridge required that Enbridge fix gaps in Line 5's protective coating and begin a study of three alternatives to replace the pipeline in the Straits: a tunnel, horizontal directional drilling, or a trench with secondary containments. By December 2018, Gov. Rick Snyder signed legislation to create the Mackinac Straits Corridor Authority and its Board voted to approve an agreement with Enbridge to build a utility tunnel in the Straits. "The propane industry was very active in lobbying with Enbridge for this legislation," Dalling said.

A new administration took office in Michigan in January 2019. Both Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Attorney General Dana Nessel had said publicly that they oppose the continued operation of Line 5 within the Straits of Mackinac. Two current lawsuits threaten the ability of Enbridge and the State to move forward with the tunnel project. One states that 2018 legislation creating the corridor authority was not properly enacted under Michigan's constitution and should be considered void. The second suit seeks to void Enbridge's use of the 1953 Line 5 easement and end its current use of the existing dual pipelines.

"We hope that Gov. Whitmer does not undo legislation previously signed by Gov. Snyder and works together to identify and resolve any issues long before heating season so not to impact consumers needing propane heat in Michigan and beyond," New York's Whitney said.

A statement from Enbridge in June 2019 responding to the lawsuits said, "Enbridge shares the Governor's vision of protecting the Great Lakes and reducing the risk to the Straits of Mackinac. Enbridge remains fully committed to moving forward in a constructive manner with the Administration to reach our mutual objective of replacing the existing Line 5 crossing as soon as possible. We believe that the most effective path forward is to work expeditiously toward permitting and construction of the Tunnel, rather than through the courts. Evidence of our commitment to work collaboratively includes continuation of our $40-million 2019 engineering and geotechnical program, which will allow us to maintain the earliest possible in-service date for the crossing. In the meantime, Enbridge will continue to assert its rights in the courts to ensure we safely meet the critical energy needs of Michiganders."

PROPANE INDUSTRY'S LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Both MPGA and NPGA have submitted letters to the Corps of Engineers. Describing the pipeline as a vital piece of the propane infrastructure serving consumers in Michigan, Ontario, and much of the Midwest, Dalling's letter from MPGA said the propane industry does not condone leaking pipelines of any kind anywhere in the state and believes that the construction of the tunnel and the replacement of the segment of Line 5 ensures the safe transportation of the propane consumed throughout the state and region.

"Opponents of the existing Line 5 and the proposed new replacement segment of the line have consistently stated that the pipeline is not needed to deliver propane. I can definitely and unequivocally state that is not the case. There is unanimous agreement among all segments of the propane industry that Line 5 is critical for the safe and reliable distribution of propane throughout Michigan. Additionally, a shutdown of the line fails to recognize the interconnectedness of energy distribution not only in the State of Michigan but globally. A

shutdown of the line would have ripple effects to the propane supply chain that would be felt throughout Michigan, the Midwest, and nationally," the MPGA letter from Dalling states.

On behalf of NPGA, the letter from Petrash included: "Should the existing Line 5 go out of service for whatever reason and the proposed tunneled Line 5 not be constructed the effects on Michigan and regional propane consumers as well as others will be significant. During the proceedings of the Pipeline Safety Advisory Board convened by Governor Snyder extensive analyses were undertaken by Dynamic Risk and a consortium of advisors led by Michigan Technological University as to how Michigan might be supplied with propane in the absence of Line 5. Those analyses suggest that there is not sufficient capacity on other pipelines to replace Line 5 throughout; that the necessary investment in rail to replace Line 5 would be measured in the billions of dollars; and that replacing Line 5 with motor carriers might involve one truck per minute crossing the Mackinac Bridge twenty-four hours a day."

He continued: "The bottom line is that any alternative to Line 5 would mean increased costs for consumers (measured in the millions of dollars), less safe means of transporting energy, less reliable energy supply, and increased emissions. Without question pipeline delivery is the most effective of all modalities. Moreover, it is unquestionably the safest and most reliable. Both motor transport and rail are less reliable in the winter, when propane is most needed in Michigan."

RETAIL MARKETER PREPAREDNESS

As decisions are made in Michigan that may affect supply, which already has its challenges in the upper-Midwest, Dalling reminded marketer members in Michigan recently that Plains LP invoked force majeure for previous contracts and current operations for an unknown period of time: With that uncertainty in mind, he reminded members of steps that they can and should be taking to ensure their supply and delivery operations.

- Make sure you have a solid supply plan that includes trusted wholesalers and transportation companies. You may want to have more than one wholesaler or transportation company serving your company. MPGA encourages you to make sure whichever companies you are choosing to do business with are members of the association.
- Utilize dispatching software and logistics experts.
- Invest in additional storage.
- Pursue relationships with contractors, builders, HVAC professionals, plumbers, etc. to help you increase customer loads and burner tips.
- Review NPGA's "ABC's of Supply Preparation" checklist.
- Consider making time for NPGA's Supply Webinar Series. ■

PERC RESEARCH & SUSTAINABILITY

Continued from **Page 33**

tion. In its liquid state, it stores very well versus other gases. It has a low carbon-to-hydrogen ratio, which means less carbon footprint. It is non-toxic and when combusted, leads to low NO_x and PM emissions." He believes there will be some amount of electrification in vehicles in the future, but that propane will be involved in many hybrid electric vehicles. He thinks that lower emissions and less PM will continue to make propane a great solution for Class 3 to Class 7 vehicles; he sees tremendous potential in the lower end of Class 8 vehicles as well. He noted "Fuel cells are a potential solution for the heavy-duty truck market as well."

"I think we have an unprecedented situation with COVID-19," he commented. "Unfortunately, it has impacted our livelihood and it will take some time for our economy to bounce back. But it makes the need for cost-effective propane solutions more critical to provide benefits for many years to come. Electricity and propane will both have its place and they both will be in our palette of solutions. With electrification, the problem of carbon emissions is not yet resolved."

Working closely with the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) as well as all propane state associations and other industry stakeholders, Munson noted that PERC has developed data-driven, provocative, assertive messaging about new opportunities for propane. "We have to be competitive when talking about propane in the overall energy portfolio," Munson said. "PERC has to be engaged with a variety of private and public organizations. It is important that we are involved with these players in the energy field, and I'm glad Gokul is also representing us in the energy conversation. Relationships are important." ■

PERC OFF-ROAD

Continued from **Page 32**

Munson said. "Propane engines with higher horsepower and higher torque make larger lifts running on propane possible." He noted there are more waterborne cargo ships worldwide running on propane engines. "This market doesn't affect U.S. domestic use as much as worldwide use since there are not a lot of cargo ships under the U.S. flag. Nonetheless, there are plenty of options for the large-scale engines to drive new markets."

MORE GROWTH OPTIONS

McDonald pointed out the propane lawn mower segment will be another segment PERC will continue to support although with less focus. "The propane industry captured a significant share of this market over the past decade," he said. "City parks, state parks, and national parks all saw the value of a lower cost and environmentally friendly method for cutting grass across the country. While the growth has slowed more recently as motor gas prices have been lower, we will continue to make marketers aware of how to promote this market segment and all the details for selling and servicing. A commercial mower often uses as much propane in a year as a typical house."

"Now, making the lens larger as we look for growth in the off-road market, there is a whole range of products in the marketplace to consider as growth options for propane," Munson concluded. "We need to look no further than the rental yard for ideas for propane growth. There are various generators, the concrete cutters of all types, and many more products large and small that can be designed to run on a propane engine. We have a very clean and cost-effective fuel and we have much more to do to maximize its usage." ■

PROPANE INDUSTRY WEIGHS IN ON UTILITY PROCEEDINGS

PAT THORNTON

"Even though propane is not a traditional regulated utility, commission decisions still have a large impact on our industry," Jacob Peterson, manager, state engagement for the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA), told ***BPN***. "Decisions that promote other energy sources, such as natural gas or electricity, to the detriment of propane, hurt our market share and limit opportunities to grow gallons."

NPGA has been actively monitoring utility proceedings across the country, according to Jeff Petrash, NPGA's vice president and general counsel. Petrash told ***BPN*** that Peterson, who joined NPGA in 2018, has been spearheading the process of monitoring dockets across the country. "Jacob has developed a system to look for cases that involve natural gas line extension policies, subsidized gas expansion projects, and transportation electrification—specifically the process of requiring non-electric vehicle (EV) drivers to pay for the operation of public EV charging stations, and other issues that affect propane's market share."



Jacob Peterson

"We locate problematic dockets and work with state and regional associations to determine the best course of action to fight back against harmful ones," Peterson said. "These actions include submitting official comments, intervening in utility proceedings, and engaging with commissioners and their staff. We want utility commissions to realize that the propane industry has a stake in the outcome of these cases."

Here are cases in four states that have recently landed on Peterson's radar:

Minnesota: A private utility is seeking permission to levy a natural gas extension project (NGEP) rider on all of its captive ratepayers to help finance the extension of gas service to new customers in an underserved part of the state. The NGEP rider was created by the legislature in 2015 to help facilitate the expansion of gas service to new areas of Minnesota.

Idaho: A private utility is proposing to revise the policies that govern its extension of natural gas mains and service lines. These rules will dictate how the utility can extend its gas delivery infrastructure to new customers and, importantly, who bears what cost in that process.

Virginia: The State Corporation Commission opened an investigation into transportation electrification to determine how it could potentially impact the affordability and reliability of the electric service provided to consumers. The Commission will study electric vehicles (EVs) and decide what is the proper role, if any, of utility investment in the deployment of public EV charging stations.

Colorado: A private utility submitted its 2021-2023 transportation electrification plan to the commission for evaluation. It includes a provision that, if approved, would allow it to own and operate public EV charging stations throughout its service territory.

DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR TRACKING

"NPGA utilizes a digital platform to track utility proceedings in all 50 states," Peterson said. "Once we find a potentially problematic docket, we engage with our state partners to determine what, if any, action should be taken. How the industry responds to any particular case depends on the unique circumstances in that docket."

This utility tracking program began in earnest in January 2019, according to Peterson. "To be effective, we must continue to get utility commissions to understand that their actions impact not only ratepayers, but competing energy industries (particularly propane) as well." ■

TECHNOLOGY CAUSES A RETHINKING OF THE VALUE OF WILL-CALL CUSTOMERS

PAT THORNTON

For years, many in the retail propane industry have looked with disdain on the "will-call" customer. These are the customers that do just as their monicker implies: they "will call" when they want propane. Consultant after consultant has told propane marketers these customers have no value and in fact represent a drag on company success. "They are portrayed as people with a 420 FICO score and a pit bull in the yard," says Mark Stillman, senior vice president and co-founder of Energy Engine LLC (Stroudsburg, Penn.). "But their value is growing in the eyes of many who see changes in consumer habits and the potential this segment represents." For years, consultants and other longtime industry veterans have encouraged strategies to convert "will-call" customers to "keep-full" customers. Stillman told ***BPN*** he doesn't dispute the advantages of this switch and having customers on a routed schedule with company-owned tanks. "Of course, having customers whose tanks are filled on the company schedule have advantages, both to have efficient routes and good storage management. Company-owned tanks add value to any retail propane company," Stillman said. "Nonetheless, will-call customers still have great potential to add plenty of extra value to a company, whether or not you are ever able to convert them to keep-full customers."

Stillman points to evolving trends across almost every industry in how customers want to do business with service providers of all types. "In the past decade, we've seen brick-and-mortar businesses replaced by buyers who now prefer an online buying experience with fast delivery," Stillman said. "Customers are taking control of the buying process, and companies who fight this trend will lose out in the long run." He notes that the evolution in most cases is driven by technology. "Consider that smartphones were barely in existence a decade ago," he said. "Texting and instant messaging were still used by a small minority back then. Amazon offers a new concept that has since grown exponentially and online buying has dramatically taken off. While many industries were ahead of the energy industry, it is no longer immune to the growing number of customers who are changing how companies will be successful in the future."

"And then came the COVID-19 crisis, accelerating 'digital first' thinking and forcing everyone to grab their smartphones to do literally everything," Stillman added. "Overnight, e-commerce has become our universal normal, from how we shop at Home Depot to how we order takeout food. This has raised the bar on consumer expectations because smart product and services companies across industries are really upping their game with progressive e-commerce systems."

How is this affecting propane dealers? "It has moved the goalposts on what it will take to satisfy a customer. Gone are the days where you only take online payments and call it 'digital engagement,'" Stillman said. "Customers want to participate and do as much as they can on their own. They want the same experience they are getting elsewhere, even at their local convenience store. Consumer-facing technology is the driving force of our collective future. But it remains a weakness for dealers."

Stillman feels that perhaps most importantly, this three-month



> ***"Customers are taking control of the buying process, and companies who fight this trend will lose out in the long run."***
>
> —Mark Stillman
> Energy Engine LLC



> ***"It is best to develop business practices that cater to the variety of customers in the market"***
>
> —Julia Miller
> Blueox Energy

revolution of e-commerce has increased the demands of will-call customers. "They want convenience, they don't want to use the phone, and they want ability to manage their account without your help," he said. "Online e-commerce registrations for fuel customers jumped 60% from March 1 to June 1. These are *new* will-call customers coming onboard with dealers. The demand is there…are you ready?"

Stillman was set to speak at the NPGA Southeastern Convention along with Ted Jeffcoat, president of TLJ3 Consulting (Rutland, Mass.), and Julia Miller, vice president of business growth and development at Blueox Energy (Oxford, N.Y.), in a session titled "Will-Call Elevated." But that was moved to a virtual session due to the cancellation of the convention. Attendees ranged from small independents to the largest MLPs.

The session was designed to show that will-call customer ranks are growing; however, they are seeking a different relationship with the seller, one that allows them to connect with you entirely online for a true e-commerce experience. Not meeting these customer demands will result in their loss to competitors or electricity.

According to Stillman, the panelists shared their experiences with how the COVID-19 digital consumer changes have become permanent and how dealers must quickly adjust. "Much of the dialogue with the audience centered around providing an enhanced online experience and how best to serve will-call customers," he said. "Topics included observed buying habits, types of technology to deploy, and the challenges of upgrading your customer-facing ecosystem. In addition, many acknowledged the growing ranks of will-call and the emergence of customer-owned tanks."

Propane is one of the last industries to face the changes in customer buying habits because it is part of the essential services category including health care, insurance, and telecom. "These segments are starting to feel the consumer pressure and will be more successful with an omni-channel business model," Stillman said. "They want to take care of the customers who still want great personal service in person or on the phone, and they also want to take care of customers who seek a true e-commerce buying experience where they never have to deal with a human being. The nice thing is that with new e-commerce customers, you barely spend time interacting and they pay up front via credit card, which makes them much easier to manage than the will-call customers of the past." He advised that this provides the path to more worthwhile customers in the long run and the feeling that will-call customers are "junk business" is a mind-set that needs to change.

Blueox Energy's Julia Miller has worked closely with Stillman's company and agrees that his suggestions are sound. "It is best to develop business practices that cater to the variety of customers in the market," Miller said. "There is still a strong space for the full-service automatic delivery customer; however, trends in our area show that population is declining quicker each year and the will-call market is expanding each year." Miller said Blueox Energy doesn't value one type of customer over the other, because they all have their pros and cons. "The automatic customer is considered loyal and guaranteed business while the will-call customers when taken care of are proving to be just as loyal and tend to pay quicker, which improves cash flow."

A believer in the value of company-owned tanks, Miller said Blueox is fortunate that not many people own their own tanks in the area. "However, if your will-call customers are shopping around, it is because you aren't taking care of their needs," Miller said. "You can't apply the same automatic model to the modern will-call customer. There is an opportunity to reassess your business model and how you cater to your customers' needs and there is good money to be made on both sides. If you are running your business right, there are no 'dead-head' miles; you are dispatching and taking care of these customers in conjunction with your full-service customers."

Miller also told ***BPN*** that you can compete with "lowball" price competitors. "Lowball competitors have always existed in the automatic model too; it's not a new concept," she said. "Find ways to add value to your customer's experience and price isn't quite as relevant." She suggests that in order to get there faster, send a text alert, and offer unique discounts or payment options. "There are also modern software applications that can automate the customer experience, which proves to give you a 12-cent advantage at minimum right out of the chute if deployed correctly." If there is a lowballer out there, Miller feels there is a good chance they don't really understand the business and have been lucky so far with market conditions. She feels that lowballers don't offer a better experience for customers. "It just depends on who you want to be in the market." ■

IT'S TIME TO GET EVEN MORE ENGAGED

CHAD KROENING

We all have stories about how COVID-19 has changed our lives. And if you've turned on your local or national news over the past few months, you'll see that government has changed, too.

Before mid-March, the gold standard of advocacy was personal contact between a voter and an elected official, with anything else being easy for legislative offices to ignore. But with the U.S. Capitol and most state capitols either closed or limiting the number of people allowed to enter, in-person conversations have shifted to the virtual. Now, it's not unusual for your member of Congress to hold a Zoom town hall and some are even hosting fundraisers where they ship you a bottle of wine to pop open during an online event at a later date. In June, NPGA hosted four legislative briefings via GoToWebinar, including one where Congressman Bob Latta gave us a peek at his home office with a webcam presentation.

And while the news of the day is still focused more on pandemic relief and recovery than anything else, it's important we don't lose our focus on the issues that will impact our industry for decades to come. In June, a bipartisan group of 37 U.S. House members passed an amendment to the *INVEST in America Act*, which makes propane autogas eligible for grant funding under the Clean Corridors Program. This victory was made possible in part due to the support of PropanePAC and the National Propane Gas Association's (NPGA) aggressive grassroots advocacy efforts.

But we can't stop with just one win. It's time for us to get even more engaged and active, especially leading up to the elections in November. There are a few things you and your company can do to ensure legislators are educated on the issues vital to the future of our industry.

First, we need you to invite your federal, state, and local legislators to visit your company in August, or schedule a meeting to visit their local office. NPGA has developed a collection of materials to assist you in these meetings, and NPGA staff will even do the heavy lifting to help with scheduling and preparing you on the issues. For more information on this effort, contact NPGA's Tyler Lawrence at *tlawrence@npga.org*.

Next, get involved with NPGA's PropanePAC, which provides financial support to Congressional candidates to complement the association's advocacy. While PropanePAC has already endorsed a substantial number of campaigns on both sides of the aisle this election cycle, much work remains to ensure propane has a seat at the table in future policy discussions. For information on PropanePAC, visit *www.npga.org/propane-pac*.

Finally, and this is the easiest thing of all, make sure you are registered to vote and you go vote on Tuesday, Nov. 3. If you're not registered to vote, visit *https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote*.

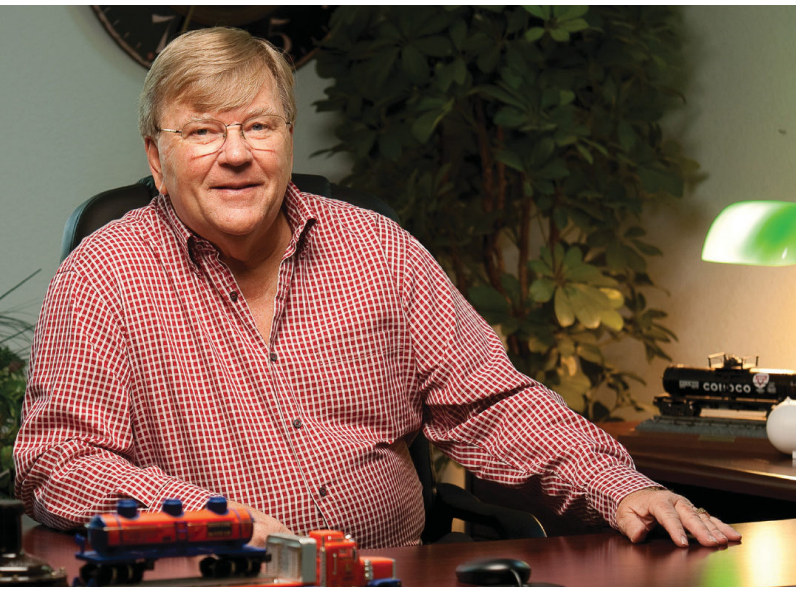
If you're concerned about the "electrification of everything," or the efforts of state and local governments to eliminate propane as an energy choice for consumers, it's time to get involved because November's election could accelerate these challenges. Educate the people who are your elected officials and help ensure propane-friendly legislators are elected. Don't take this time for granted.

Chad Kroening, vice president of safety and commercial operations at Boehlke Bottled Gas Corp. (Cedarburg, Wis.), is chair of the PropanePAC Steering Committee.



THE ACTIONS WE TAKE AFFECT OURSELVES AND MANY OTHERS

FRANK THOMPSON



I recently devoted some time to reflection upon my time in this industry. Twenty-six years insuring propane marketers. Twenty-six years of working with good people who make their living selling a fuel that is clean burning and renewable. Twenty-six years of learning the propane business and applying what I have studied and learned about risk management and insurance to the industry.

Have I made a difference? I can look back at some monumental occasions when what I knew kept a company in business. For example, there was the explosion and fire that destroyed a major fuel distributor in 2006. Because I had asked them to increase their property values and business income, which they did, their business was able to rebuild and come back stronger than they were before.

Then there was the propane company that had a wholesale customer that owned its own storage tanks and regulators and used propane in its hot oil business. We suggested using a written contract limiting its liability to the safe filling of the customer's tanks. They taught the customer's employees the safe handling of propane and had them sign off. They also did a GAS Check in writing and gave them a duty to warn packet. A subsequent explosion did $10 million of damage, and the hot oil company only had $6 million of insurance. Our insured walked away from a $4-million demand.

But what about the everyday problems, the what-ifs or the close calls, that we hear about from marketers; have I kept my eyes on safety for everyone?

I recently spoke with Todd Buechler, AVP of Risk Engineering for Crum & Forster. We talked about what the propane industry is doing to help safeguard employees, customers, and marketers. Todd mentioned he would like to see companies focus more attention on driver safety to reduce vehicle accidents. Vehicle accidents and the cost associated with these losses continue to rise. The commercial auto insurance industry has seen nine straight years of unprofitability. With increasing auto premiums, more companies should focus on improving driver hiring, training, and using technology to help monitor driver activities, in a way to reduce accidents and expenses.

He mentioned that overall, companies are doing a better job with training, but there is room for improvement. Crum & Forster believes continuous comprehensive training is key. For example, some companies may focus on completing CETP Basics and Bobtail Delivery, but not incorporate the Vapor Distribution Systems class. The propane industry has one of the best comprehensive sets of training programs for an industry called Certified Employee Training Program, known as CETP. Todd reminded me that training should not end when the class is over. During this COVID-19 period, Crum & Forster partnered with Silverback Consulting to offer free virtual CETP and hazardous materials training classes. These virtual classes have been valuable since many in-person, classroom-type courses have been canceled.

The commitment to training needs to involve all employee positions in the company as this shows everyone that education and safety is important. No matter an employee's years of experience, anyone can learn something new or need a refresher on safety procedures.

Todd also mentioned that it is important to verify company policies and procedures and determine if industry standards are being adhered to. You have probably heard the phrase, "inspect what you expect." Getting a third party to assist with an audit is valuable as it may identify areas of deficiency. He recommended to take advantage of the risk management services that are offered by their insurance company.

I kept thinking about what Todd said, "The actions you take not only affect yourself, but the lives of so many other people." So it is pertinent to take a moment to think about what you do and how you do it for the best safe outcome for everyone.

Frank B. Thompson is a chartered property and casualty underwriter based in Phoenix. He is the owner of PT Risk Management, an independent insurance company specializing in writing propane and petroleum risk policies throughout the U.S.

Continued from **Page 22**

again in 2021. If I lived far apart from my family or friends, that would be my first designation, but I'm fortunate enough to have them all close to me (but not too close) during this pandemic. ☺

Hayley Karicofe
AmeriGas
Churchville, Va.

BON VOYAGE

It seems many have learned something about themselves during the pandemic that they may not have learned if it hadn't happened. It's been a difficult reality to face with some tragic outcomes. Freedom of movement is clearly one of the freedoms we dearly miss. Whether your ambition is the next town or far-distant continents, travel safely as you navigate in this new world.

Nancy Coop is an industry advocate. She serves as a director at Cetane Associates. Readers may contact her at ncoop@cetane.net.

—CORRECTION—

An article in the June issue of ***BPN***, "Workers' Compensation Dilemmas" by Frank Thompson, provided an example of an employee doing clerical or outside salesperson's duties along with filling propane bottles. It stated that if the propane marketer kept Verifiable Time Records, an independent workers' compensation (WC) auditor would be allowed to utilize a lower WC code for the majority of the employee's payroll. The National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI) reports that this would not be allowed: "Whether or not separate verifiable records for time spent in the office vs. time filling propane tanks were kept, a division of payroll would still not be allowed per NCCI Basic Manual Rule 2-G. The employee would be assigned to the appropriate basic classification for the duties associated with propane bottle filling." For any questions, contact NCCI's Customer Service Department at *https://www.ncci.com/Pages/ContactUs.aspx*.

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CARL KAPLAN



CHRISTINA ARMENTANO



KEVIN WATSON

Paraco Gas

Carl Kaplan has joined **Paraco Gas** (Rye Brook, N.Y.) as a business development associate for the company's Mergers and Acquisitions team. Kaplan has 20 years of experience in marketing and business development, which will help the family-owned and operated company to identify and pursue potential acquisition opportunities. He was previously a business development executive in mergers and acquisitions at Ferrellgas.

Joseph Armentano, CEO and chairman of the board of directors of Paraco Gas Corp., has appointed **Christina Armentano** and **Kevin Watson** to its board, joining its present board of three independent directors.

Christina Armentano, executive vice president, sales and business development, joined Paraco in 2014. She is a member of the executive team.

Kevin Watson joined Paraco as CFO in 2018. Also a member of the executive team, he is responsible for the financial structure of the company.

Sue Gampp, an **ADD Systems** (Flanders, N.J.) employee since 2001, passed away May 20. She began as a trainer in the Implementation Department, then shortly moved to the newly formed Projects Group, a team created to assist clients with large or unique projects. In 2015, she was promoted to manager of the group. More recently, she was instrumental in the creation of ADD's Wholesale Group, a team focused on the application of ADD software for customers with wholesale petroleum divisions.

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INDUSTRY CALENDAR

All events are subject to cancellation. Before making plans to attend an event, please contact the organizer.

2020

Aug. 1-31—Eastern Energy Expo Virtual Event. Admission is free! Every attendee will create their individual login to the On Demand, *easternenergyexpo.com*

Aug. 5-7—Pacific Propane Gas Association Annual Conference & Membership Meeting, Sunriver Resort, Sunriver, Ore. (844) 585-4940; *pacificpropane.org/newsroom/events/2020-annual-conference-membership-meeting/*

Aug. 20—PERC Council Virtual Meeting. For more information contact Anna Lombardo at *anna.lombardo@propane.com*

Sept 13-15—NPGA Fall TS & S Committee Virtual Meeting. Members are to register with NPGA. (202) 466-7200 Ext 335; *npga.org/organization/npga-events/*

Sept. 16—Michigan Propane Gas Association Propane Safety Awareness Day, Michigan State Capitol Lawn, Lansing. (517) 487-2021; *mipga.org/training-events/propane-safety-awareness-day*

Sept. 27-29—National Propane Gas Association Fall Board of Directors Virtual Meeting. Details to be announced. (202) 466-7200; *npga.org/organization/npga-events/*

Sept. 30-Oct. 1—ACI European Bulk Liquid Storage Summit, location tba, Cartagena, Spain. *pxavier@acieu.net; wplgroup.com/aci/event/european-bulk-liquid-storage/*

Oct. 4-6—Manufactured Housing Institute 2020 Annual Meeting, Grand Hyatt Denver, Denver, Colo. *info@mfghome.org; manufacturedhousing.org/conferences-meetings/*

Oct. 14-15—Propane Gas Association of New England Annual Fall Meeting, AC Marriott, Portsmouth, N.H. (888) 445-1075; *pgane.org/newsroom/events/2020-summer-meeting/*

Nov. 5-6—National Propane Gas Association Fall Benchmarking Council Meeting, Embassy Suites Scottsdale Resort, Scottsdale, Ariz. (202) 466-7200, ext. 335; *npga.org/organization/npga-events/*

Nov. 10-11—PERC Council Meeting, The Henderson, Destin, Fla. (202) 452-8975; *propane.com/newsroom/events/perc-council-meeting-4/*

Nov. 15-17—Air-Conditioning, Heating & Refrigeration Institute Leadership Forum, La Quinta Resort & Club, Palm Springs, Calif. (703) 524-8800; *ahrinet.org/News-Events/Meetings-and-Events*

Dec. 6-10—23rd World Petroleum Congress, George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston. *info@wpc2020.com; wpc2020.com*

Dec. 8-10—Power-Gen International, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Fla. (888) 299-8016; *power-gen.com*

2021

March 4-5—National Propane Gas Association Spring Benchmarking Council Meeting, Sheraton Charlotte Hotel, Charlotte, N.C. (202) 466-7200; *npga.org/organization/npga-events/*

For additional calendar items, visit ***bpnews.com***





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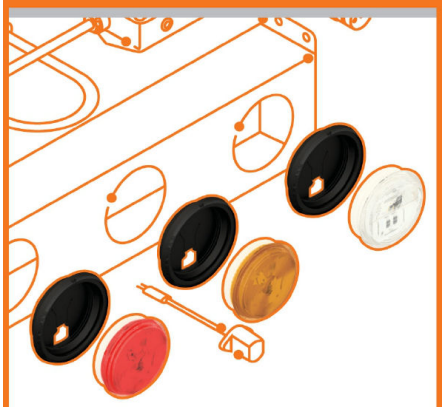
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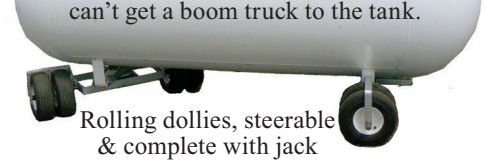
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SOFTWARE 2020

Continued from **Page 29**

"Our good tech team and our ability to host data has been a big deal for us this year. We have ways to make this all as easy and painless as possible."

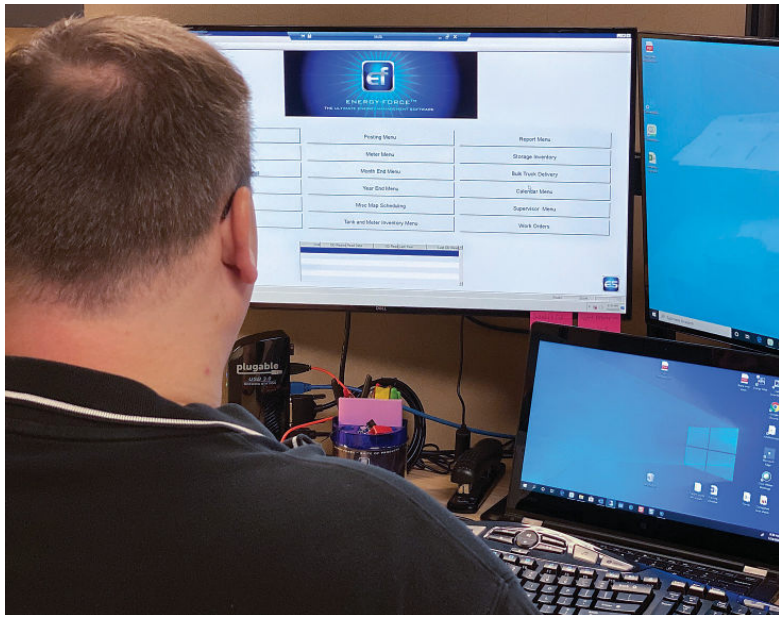
For more information, visit *www.rccbi.com*. You can also view a video about RCC at *www.rccbi.com/media/rcc_overview.mp4*.

An upgraded e-commerce system and strong reports with actionable items are the newest enhancements available for Energy-Force, an integrated system of modules for propane or refined fuel businesses. That's what **K&K Management Solutions** (Avon, Ind.) intended to promote at the spring trade shows.

"One thing we were going to focus on was the accessibility of data with built-in reporting," says Mat Jones, sales. With Energy-Force, businesses can make better operational decisions with data. It generates strong reports with actionable items. "One example is our tank utilization report," Jones explains. "You can run a report showing all the steel you have in the field. If there is a case where a 1000-gal. tank would be better than the 500-gal. tank installed, the report will tell you." This reduces the number of deliveries to a tank and advises which tanks need to be "switched out."

OptimizerPlus also does scheduling while you sleep. "The No. 1 thing propane marketers talk about is that they are tired of routing," says Lynn Sheets, executive business consultant at K&K Management Solutions. "OptimizerPlus automates that." It handles K-factor, call-in, and Julian tanks; adjusts for summer and fall fills; and utilizes imported tank monitor reads for efficient scheduling. "It's all automated," Sheets notes. "It follows your rules and decides the best delivery to make." You can not "out think" the OptimizerPlus.

The company's e-commerce module, Energy-Commerce, has been enhanced with PCI compliance. "Our customers don't have to store credit card numbers; it's stored at the merchant processor," Jones explains. Energy-Commerce also allows customers to text ACH and credit card payments. It integrates with the Energy-Force system, so payments are updated and don't have to be manually keyed in. "During the pandemic, we've had customers decide they need to utilize our E-commerce, because their customers are asking for it," Sheets added.



K&K Management Solutions

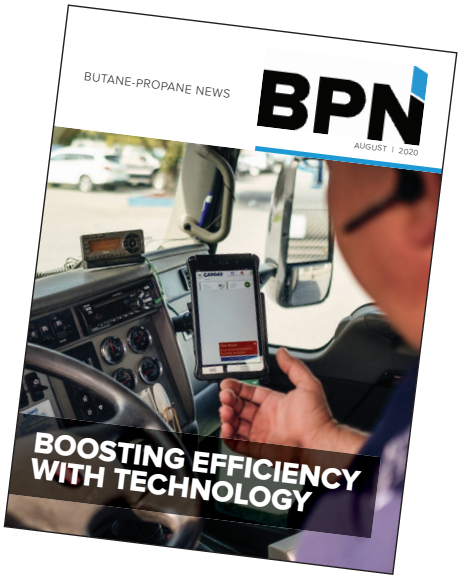
K&K Management Solutions' training has gone online during the pandemic. Customer training is being done via Cisco Webex and new customers are being brought live remotely, with no need for onsite setup and training.

"We've adapted and we're moving forward with the way things are changing today," Jones says. Sheets adds that is true of the company's software, too. "Energy-Force is always evolving with the changing climate and conditions."

For more information, visit *www.energy-force.com*. ■

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A PASSION FOR ENGINEERING, MAKING DRIVERS' JOBS EASIER

KAREN MASSMAN VanASDALE

As a design engineer at Westmor Industries (Morris, Minn.), Meranda Hormann is passionate about making the delivery of propane easier for drivers. At age 28, Hormann has already spent more than 10 years in the propane industry and was selected this year as a charter member of the Young Gassers' 30 Under 30 program.

Created by the International Association of Young Gassers in conjunction with the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) and the Canadian Propane Association (CPA), the 30 Under 30 program invests in, engages, and encourages young professionals working in the propane gas industry.

It was her younger sister, Steph Hennen, manager of marketing and customer service for Lakes Gas in Wyoming, Minn., who encouraged Hormann to join the Young Gassers. The propane industry has been a topic of family discussions for most of the sisters' lives. Hormann's father, Mike Hennen, is the general manager of Westmor's truck and trailer division, and has been with the company for more than 30 years.

"I was good in math and always wanted to go to school for engineering," Hormann said. "I grew up around Westmor; it's like family here."

In high school, she began mowing and doing lawn work for the company and then interned in the summers while earning a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from North Dakota State University. After graduation in 2016, she returned to her hometown of Morris, Minn., to work full time at Westmor.

Morris, where Westmor is headquartered, is a college town with a population of about 5000. There were 60 students in Hormann's high school graduating class. Westmor, a division of Superior Industries, is one of the town's largest employers.

The privately-owned company manufactures products to store, transport, and dispense petroleum, propane, and other liquids and gasses from pipeline to pump. It also provides aftermarket support including parts sales, product repair, infrastructure installation, and in-field services.

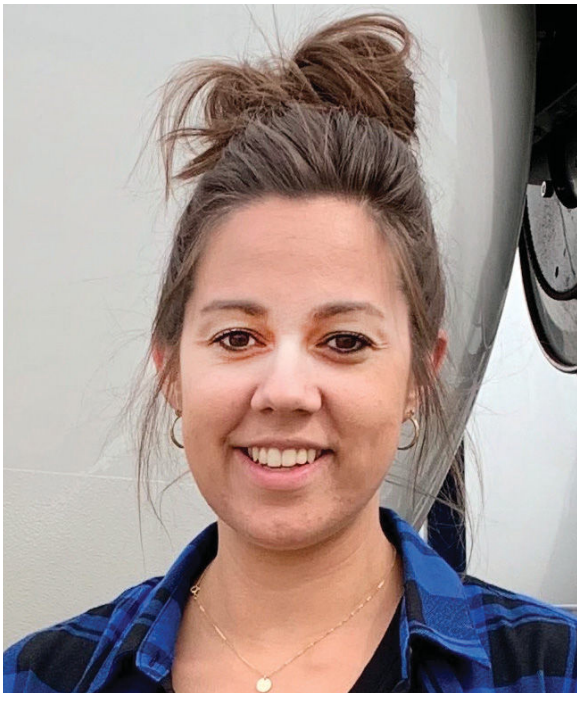
"I love what I do. We're always trying to improve our products to help customers. We do a lot of custom work and custom options," Hormann said. Westmor is the developer of Ergoload Deck Design, which provides drivers with a more ergonomic and comfortable way to load bobtails and improves efficiency and productivity.

"My current challenge is continuing to enhance all our designs and create innovative designs for our bobtails to benefit our customers," she said. "My favorite part of the job is putting in all the hard work and then seeing the final product you designed and working with production to see it through."

As one of the few females and younger members in the engineering department, Hormann said finding her voice was a bit intimidating at first, but she now encourages others, including new interns, to speak up when they have ideas.

"I didn't know how I would be received since I was so young, but building relationships with people in the industry makes it easier to navigate. As I gain more experience and confidence in what I know, it gets easier," she said.

"I am continually learning more things all the time. Building relationships has been huge. If you can't go talk to others, it makes it difficult. Don't be afraid to speak your mind and have ideas."

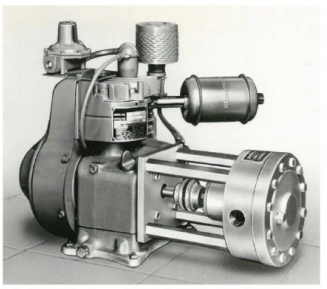
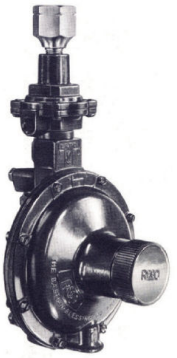


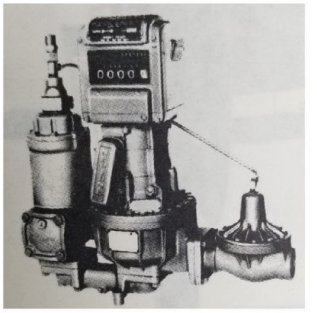
Spending long hours collaborating with co-workers and often arriving early just to do so is the fun part of Hormann's job. "I usually work 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. It's easy when you like what you're doing and who you're working with," she said. "I think it's going to be a new challenge in October when my husband and I have our first child."

Although she admitted she needs to find more of a work-life balance, especially as she starts a family of her own, Hormann is committed to her career in the propane industry. "My goal is to continue learning and get more involved in the industry." ■

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