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NOVEMBER | 2020



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WELCOMING NEWCOMERS

STEVE RELYEA

For Natalie Peal, one of the most valuable parts of industry events has been the informal get-togethers she's shared with other women who own propane businesses. She has learned a great deal while talking over dinner with her peers.

"Having dinner with others is an easy way to sit and brainstorm," she says. "In a casual atmosphere, you can ask questions and not feel someone is going to roll their eyes at you. You can have an informative discussion."

Today, as publisher of ***BPN*** and an active member of industry organizations, she tries to extend that same sort of welcome and camaraderie to other women as they join the propane industry. On Oct. 22, Peal was recognized for this with an Outstanding Achievement Award from Women in LPG (WINLPG), an initiative of the World LPG Association.

Peal was introduced to the propane industry at an early age. Her father, Bill Clark, had been an editor of ***BPN*** since the end of World War II. Then, in 1969, he bought the publication. At that time, Peal was newly married, attending college, and employed at another job. Still, she stepped in to help and gradually took on more responsibilities. "When other people didn't complete a job, I took over to get it done," she says. "My dad oversaw the business things, but I took that upon myself too. I talked to the accountants and attorneys, and I learned along the way."

As her father got older and started to back away from the business, Peal was ready to run things. One landmark moment happened not in the office, but in a bank. A salesman had talked her father, who was then in his 80s, into a questionable financial arrangement. Peal got him out of it. "I went in and fought for him. He respected that. In some ways, experiences like that got me where I am today."

Over the years, as she learned by doing, she also talked with others who were doing the same thing in their own businesses. She is a participant in WINLPG and is a founding member and current board member of the Women in Propane Council of the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA). In these groups, she has met people who have provided good counsel on business and on life.

She has also promoted these groups and their causes in ***BPN***. In this trade publication, she shares news with the industry while also learning from those who are interviewed for articles. "The women we've featured in the magazine are good examples of what you can do in this industry."

Before the pandemic, Peal continued to have those dinners with her peers. She looks forward to returning to them when industry events resume. She also enjoys welcoming those who are attending an event for the first time. "I always try to get to know newer people," Peal concludes. "It is a natural thing for me to introduce people I have gotten to know to other women who are new to the industry. I don't want women to feel isolated; I want to make sure they can get to know people."

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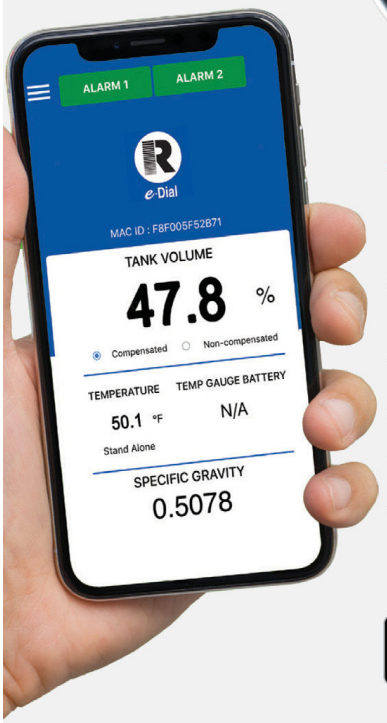
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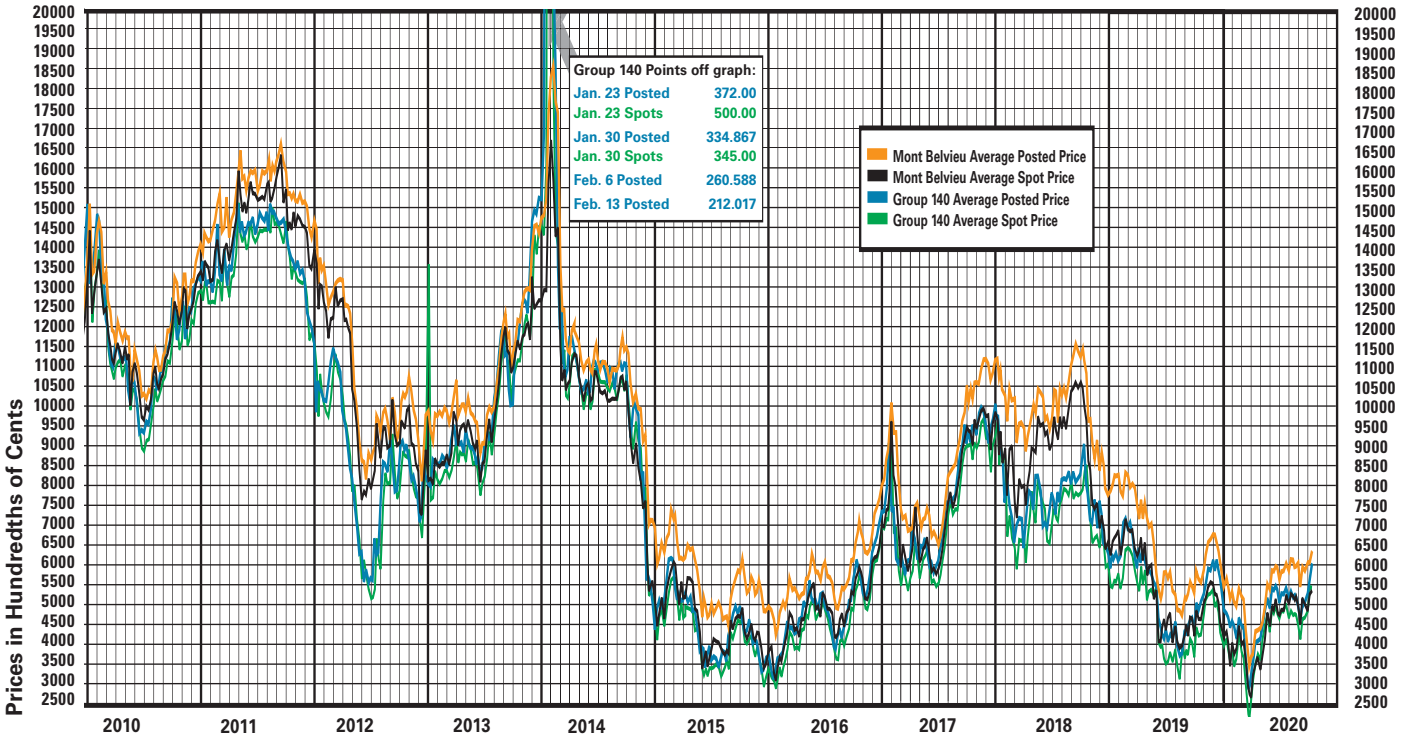
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MONT BELVIEU & GROUP 140 AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES

MID-WEEK AVERAGE POSTED/ SPOT PROPANE PRICES

(Cents per Gallon)

Date	Mont Belvieu		Group 140	
	POSTED	SPOT	POSTED	SPOT
9-17-20	59.757	51.375-51.875	49.467	45.75-46.375
9-24-20	58.507	49.75-50.00	50.417	45.75-46.75
10-1-20	60.673	47.375-48.125	52.917	46.785-48.25
10-8-20	60.840	52.00-52.875	56.967	54.375-54.625
10-15-20	63.507	53.00-53.50	60.117	53.50-54.50

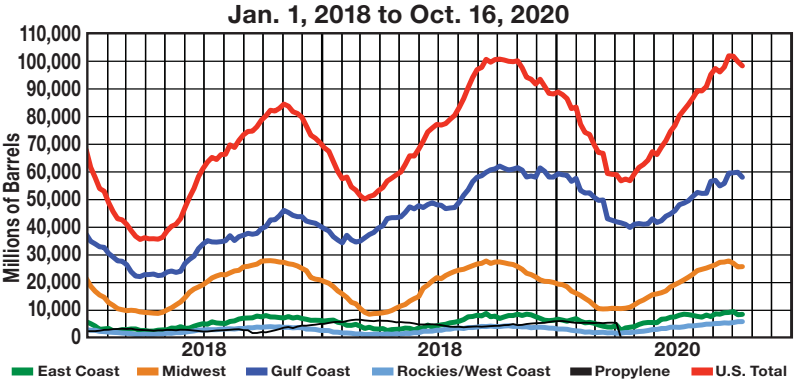
U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Sept. 18, 2020 to Oct. 16, 2020 and One Year Ago

	9/18/20	9/25/20	10/2/20	10/9/20	10/16/20	10/18/19
East Coast	9,134	9,221	9,551	8,419	8,539	8,117
Midwest	27,445	27,832	27,003	25,658	25,790	26,784
Gulf Coast	55,851	59,539	59,708	59,881	58,079	55,967
Rockies/West	5,459	5,366	5,581	5,939	5,917	4,415
U.S. Total	97,890	101,959	101,842	99,897	98,325	95,282

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Jan. 1, 2018 to Oct. 16, 2020



U.S. RESIDENTIAL PROPANE PRICES

(Mid-Month, Cents per Gallon)

Region	Date		
	10-20	9-20	10-19
East Coast (PADD I)	250.1	N/A	254.8
Midwest (PADD II)	137.1	N/A	139.4
Average U.S.	176.4	N/A	184.0

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

CANADIAN INVENTORIES

(Oct. 1, 2020)

Thousand Cubic Meters

PROPANE

Region	10-20	9-20	Change	10-19
Propane—East	887.0	859.3	+3.2%	512.5
Propane–West	1489.4	1477.4	+0.8%	800.5
Total Propane	**2376.4**	**2336.6**	**+1.7%**	**1313.0**

BUTANE

Butane—East	465.0	511.6	–9.1%	366.1
Butane—West	949.8	910.8	+4.3%	484.8
Total Butane	**1414.9**	**1422.3**	**–0.5%**	**850.9**

Source: National Energy Board

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MODIFIED HOURS OF SERVICE HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED

The National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) is reminding the propane industry that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has published several modifications to Hours of Service regulatory provisions, including expanding and extending elements of the short-haul operation exemption. As of Sept. 29, motor carriers and drivers can now implement the modifications.

Among the changes included are improving the short-haul operation exemption by extending the maximum on-duty time from 12- to 14-hours and expanding the maximum air-mile radius from 100- to 150-air miles. The modifications also include changes to the regulations on adverse driving conditions, 30-minute rest break requirements, and split sleeper-berth.

NPGA estimates these modifications will save the industry more than $11 million annually in paperwork costs, and provide 30,000 bobtail drivers more time to serve customers during deliveries.

NPGA members are invited to peruse the Fact Sheet crafted by the association to assist members in implementing the new hours of service provisions. The Fact Sheet is also available on the Membership Dashboard of the NPGA website, *npga.org*.

DCC PROPANE ACQUIRES NES GROUP

Cetane Associates LLC has announced that DCC Propane LLC, a division of DCC plc ("DCC Propane"), of Roberts, Ill., has acquired the full-service energy business of Northeast Oil and Propane Inc. and Saveway Petroleum Inc. (together the "NES Group") headquartered in Brooklyn, Conn. The transaction closed on Sept. 2.

The NES Group is a long-established, full-service energy provider that sells and delivers propane and other related products and services to over 22,000 customers located throughout Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. The company operates under the brand names Saveway Petroleum, Northeast Oil & Propane, Uncas Gas, and Buy-Rite Fuel from three office locations and two bulk storage facilities.

DCC Propane is comprised of propane retailers across the U.S. that have served communities for over 70 years, providing propane for residential, agricultural, commercial, and industrial uses. Additionally, DCC Propane includes Rocket Propane, a wholesale supplier of propane; Rocket Supply, a supplier of propane and anhydrous trucks, parts, and service; and Hicks Water Solutions, a water conditioning business. DCC Propane employs more than 500 people across its operations in 14 states.

David Scott, co-owner and president of the NES Group, expressed that "selling our business was our family's long-term plan. We think that the Saveway Petroleum, Northeast Oil & Propane, Uncas Gas, and Buy-Rite Fuel brand names have a tremendous value to DCC Propane, who we know will take it to the next level, especially working with our management team."

THOMPSONGAS EXPANDS FOOTPRINT IN CAROLINAS, VIRGINIA, AND MINNESOTA

ThompsonGas (Frederick, Md.) recently completed its seventh and eighth acquisitions in 2020 with the purchase of Pirkl Gas Inc., a propane provider based in Owatonna, Minn., and EnergyUnited Propane, an energy provider in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Terms of the deals were not provided. The acquisitions will grow ThompsonGas' footprint in Minnesota as well as the Eastern seaboard.

Pirkl's customers and employees are welcomed into the ThompsonGas family. ThompsonGas is committed to serving the customers who have valued the Pirkl's presence and service in the area for 61 years.

EnergyUnited Propane has 14 locations with 70-plus employees serving more than 29,000 customers. ThompsonGas says it is dedicated to serving the customers who have valued and trusted EnergyUnited's presence and service in the area for over 20 years.

API'S STATEMENT ABOUT GOV. NEWSOM'S EXECUTIVE ORDER

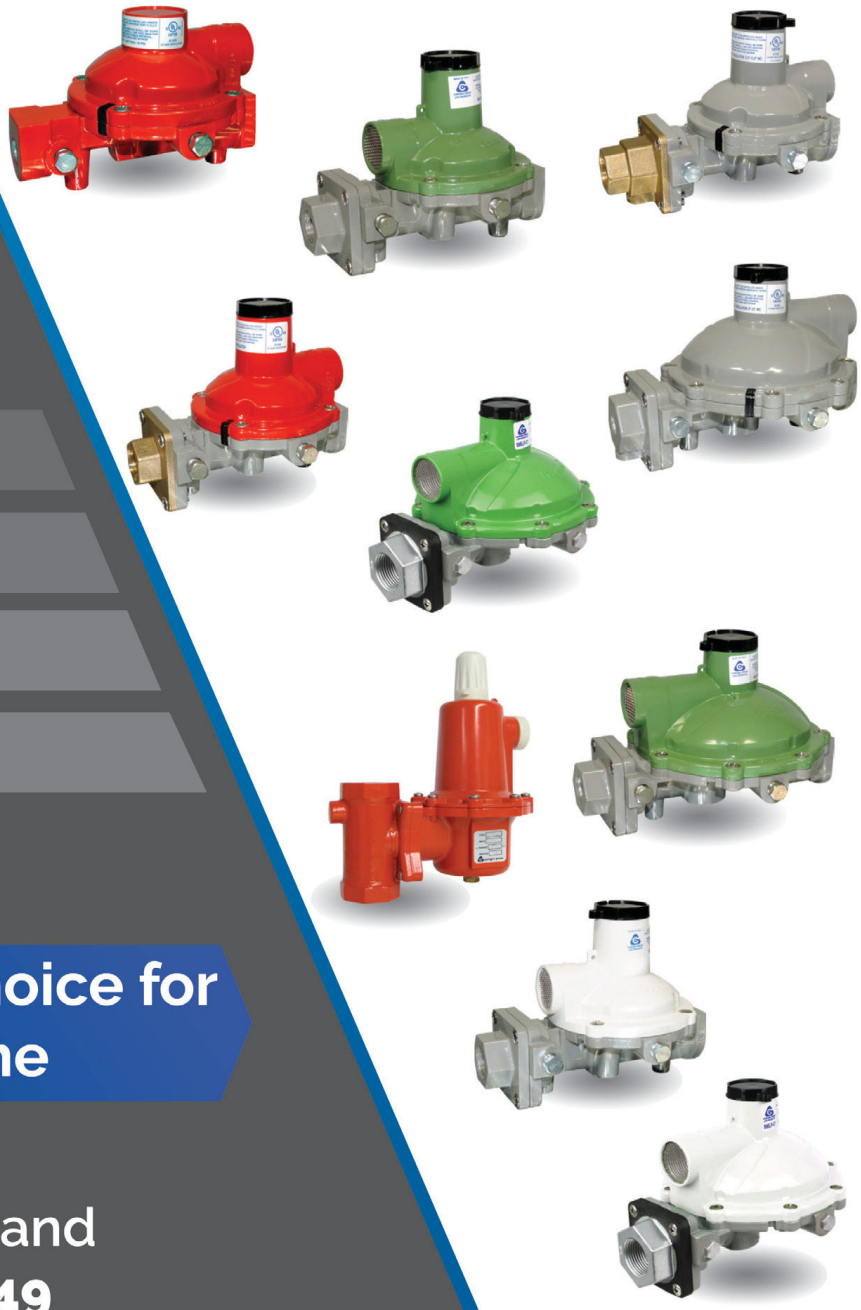
The American Petroleum Institute (API; Washington, D.C.) released the following statement Sept. 24 in response to California Gov. Gavin Newsom's executive order banning the sale of new gasoline and diesel-powered passenger cars in the state by 2035.

"This is a profoundly counterproductive plan that will deny hardworking Californians the choice to buy a car that suits their needs and budget," said Frank Macchiarola, API senior vice president of policy, economics, and regulatory affairs. "The solutions to today's challenges will not be born out of rhetoric-laden bans like this but rather the product of innovation and thoughtful policymaking. What we saw from the governor today [Sept. 24] is merely a plan to increase the cost of living in California."

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 more than 10 million U.S. jobs and is backed by a growing grassroots movement of millions of Americans.

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PRITZKER PRIVATE CAPITAL RECAPITALIZES ENERGY DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS

Pritzker Private Capital (PPC; Chicago), a leader in family direct investing, announced Oct. 6 the completion of a successful recapitalization of Energy Distribution Partners (EDP), one of the leading distributors of propane and light fuels in North America. Pritzker Private Capital has invested alongside Concentric Equity Partners and Duchossois Capital Management, in partnership with EDP's management team, who will continue to lead the business. Financial terms were not disclosed.

Headquartered in Chicago, EDP operates 26 regional branch locations spanning 10 states across the U.S. The company serves more than 120,000 residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural customers through a diverse network of service centers. EDP was founded in 2012 by Thomas Knauff, an industry veteran with a track record of founding and building energy distribution companies. The firm has successfully grown through acquisitions of locally-managed market leaders and plans to continue to expand and diversify through the addition of new retail propane and midstream operations.

"Since our founding, EDP has cultivated a culture committed to delivering outstanding quality and service across all of the local markets in which we operate," said Thomas Knauff, CEO of EDP. "Our collaboration with PPC, Concentric, and Duchossois will advance our growth strategy… This is the ideal long-term partnership to guide EDP into our next chapter."

EIA'S NATURAL GAS ANNUAL 2019 REPORTS RECORD HIGHS

The U.S. Energy Information Administration's (EIA) Natural Gas Annual 2019, released Oct. 5, 2020, shows that the United States set new records in natural gas production, consumption, and gross exports in 2019. During the year, dry natural gas production increased by 10%, reaching a record-high average of 93.1 Bcfd. At the same time, U.S. natural gas consumption increased by 3%, led by greater use of natural gas in the electric power sector. Natural gas gross exports increased 29% to 12.8 Bcfd.

Increased use of natural gas by the electric power sector drove U.S. natural gas consumption growth. The electric power sector consumed 7% more natural gas in 2019 than in 2018. Electric power sector consumption grew largely because of favorable natural gas prices and ongoing coal plant



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retirements. At the same time, natural gas consumption in all other sectors was relatively unchanged.

While U.S. natural gas production increased, the volume of natural gas exports—both through pipelines and as liquefied natural gas (LNG)—increased for the fifth consecutive year to an annual average of 12.8 Bcfd. U.S. LNG exports accounted for most of this increase.

The U.S. continued to export more natural gas than it imported in 2019, and net natural gas exports averaged 5.2 Bcfd. In 2019, the U.S. also exported more natural gas by pipeline than it imported for the first time since at least 1985 (the earliest year in EIA's natural gas pipeline trade data), mainly because of increased pipeline capacity to send natural gas to Canada and Mexico.

In 2019, dry natural gas production increased by 10%, or 8.7 Bcfd, reaching a record high of 93.1 Bcfd for the year. This increase was the second-largest volumetric increase since at least 1930 and second only to last year's increase.

The two largest natural gas-producing states, Texas and Pennsylvania, also had the two largest increases in natural gas production in 2019. Texas annual average dry natural gas production increased 15%, from 19.3 Bcfd in 2018 to 22.2 Bcfd in 2019. Pennsylvania's natural gas production increased 10%, from 16.9 Bcfd in 2018 to 18.6 Bcfd in 2019. Wyoming natural gas production decreased 11%, from 4.3 Bcfd in 2018 to 3.9 Bcfd in 2019. This decrease was the largest year-on-year decline of any state in 2019.

PERC HIGHLIGHTS MAINTENANCE ADVANTAGES OF PROPANE AUTOGAS

The Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) has released a new online resource to highlight the ease of propane autogas vehicle maintenance. It is designed for fleet owners interested in lowering their maintenance costs and downtime.

"Propane autogas provides fleets with the lowest total cost-of-ownership, and a big reason for that is because of its low maintenance and infrastructure costs, including those for garage and maintenance facilities," said Steve Whaley, director of autogas business development at PERC. "Our newest resource showcases how fleets can transform their maintenance for the better with propane autogas."

The free guide, available on *Propane.com*, outlines the main benefits of propane autogas vehicle maintenance, including its cost benefits, reduced downtime, and simplified winter maintenance. It also highlights the ease of servicing propane autogas vehicles compared to diesel, gasoline, and electric.

Fleet owners can also learn about the virtually seamless transi-



tion for maintenance crews. Since no additional certification training is required to work on propane autogas vehicles, as long as existing buildings are code compliant for gasoline and diesel, most fleets won't need to modify their garaging or maintenance facilities. Fleets should check with their local Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) for questions about their facility.

The guide is now available in PERC's maintenance online learning page. More information on propane autogas vehicles is available at *Propane.com/Fleet-Vehicles*.

LLOYD'S REGISTER GROUP TO SELL ENERGY BUSINESS TO INSPIRIT CAPITAL

Global professional services organization, Lloyd's Register Group (LR; London), announced Oct. 7 that it has entered into a definitive agreement to sell its Energy business unit to Inspirit Capital, a London-based investment firm focused on building long-term value.

The deal will create a new engineering and technical consultancy offering specialist asset performance, risk management, and project management expertise across complex industrial assets, the energy transition, and rail infrastructure.

Commenting on the announcement, LR's CEO, Alastair Marsh, said, "As part of an ongoing strategic review of our business, we reached the decision that this transaction is the best option to realize the long-term growth potential of our Energy business. LR Energy offers world-class engineering solutions across the sector, and the partnership with Inspirit provides them with further support and investment to underpin their growth objectives. The LR Group remains committed to the energy sector, continuing to support our clients through our offshore compliance, digital products, and inspection services businesses, in collaboration with our former LR Energy colleagues where appropriate."

David Clark, LR's energy director, who will lead the new company, added, "This is an exciting new chapter for us, which supports our mission to help clients tackle complexity head on. This announcement provides us with a partner to build on our existing track record and unlock our growth potential as a standalone business, offering our full suite of technical, regulatory, and operational expertise. The increasing complexity we are seeing, with the transition and restructuring of the energy markets and the impact of digital transformation across our global energy complex industrial and transport customers, means our solutions are more relevant than ever."

The transaction was expected to be complete by Oct. 31. It was not subject to any formal regulatory or other approvals.



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$11 MILLION AWARD IN LOUISIANA GAS THEFT EXPLOSION CASE

DAVID R. SCHLEE

This column was originally printed in the April 2011 issue of **BPN**.

In July 2010, a jury in St. Landry Parish, La., returned a verdict that, with interest charges, was over $11 million against CenterPoint Energy, a natural gas utility. The plaintiffs were the children and grandchildren of a man who broke a lock installed by CenterPoint when it shut off his service for non-payment.

When the man initiated illegal gas service to his house, he inadvertently allowed gas to escape from an open gas line. The gas exploded, injuring himself, his wife, his four children, and his infant grandchild. The case is *Jones v. CenterPoint Energy*.

THEFT AND EXPLOSION

In the spring of 2003, CenterPoint Energy discontinued gas service to the house of Carl Jones in Opelousas, La., for non-payment of bills. At that time, CenterPoint installed a lock on the service valve. CenterPoint continued to monitor the house's meter for movement so it could remove the meter if it detected any unauthorized gas flow. CenterPoint alleged that it also installed a blind plate to prevent gas from flowing into the house if someone broke the lock and attempted to turn the gas back on to the house.

A month after CenterPoint discontinued service to Jones' residence, Jones broke the plastic lock that CenterPoint installed and restored gas service to his house.









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While he successfully reinitiated gas flow to his house, he also unfortunately initiated gas flow to a leaking gas line where a gas appliance had formerly been located.

A few weeks later, at 4:00 a.m. on June 15, 2003, Jones' wife Brenda lit a cigarette, ignited the gas that collected in the house, and caused an explosion that destroyed the house and burned the seven family members living there.

LAWSUIT

In May 2004, Brenda Jones, the Jones children, and grandchild sued CenterPoint for negligence, alleging that CenterPoint improperly cut off gas service. Specifically, the plaintiffs claimed that it was foreseeable that a customer would break a plastic lock to steal gas, and therefore CenterPoint should have installed a metal lock to deter Jones from stealing the gas that escaped and caused the explosion that injured them. Perhaps understandably, Carl Jones did not join the lawsuit.

CenterPoint countered that Jones' actions alone caused the plaintiffs' injuries: he purposefully subverted CenterPoint's measures to prevent gas theft and introduced gas into his house where it escaped and exploded.

CenterPoint also asserted that it took several measures to prevent Jones from stealing gas and allowing it to flow into his house. In addition to locking the house's service valve, CenterPoint alleged that it installed a blind plate to prevent gas flow. Moreover, CenterPoint asserted that it monitors meters on houses from which it discontinues service, and removes the meters if they show any movement. However, CenterPoint argued that it did not detect the theft in this case because Jones disconnected his house's meter to hide his theft.

On July 19, 2010, the trial began. CenterPoint argued that the explosion would not have occurred if Jones did not cut a lock and introduce the gas into the house that caused the explosion. CenterPoint also argued that Jones even removed a blind plate and disconnected the meter to steal the gas and hide his theft from CenterPoint.

However, the plaintiffs successfully convinced the jury that CenterPoint should have expected Jones to attempt to steal gas and therefore should have taken more measures to prevent his actions. They argued that CenterPoint installed only a plastic lock rather than a stronger metal lock, did not install a blind plate in the gas line, and should have removed the meter to prevent Jones from initiating gas into his house. The plaintiffs suggested that CenterPoint also failed to deter theft by not prosecuting others for stealing gas.

VERDICT

After deliberating for three hours, the jury returned with a verdict for the plaintiffs totaling $15,334,443. The jury

Continued on Page 45



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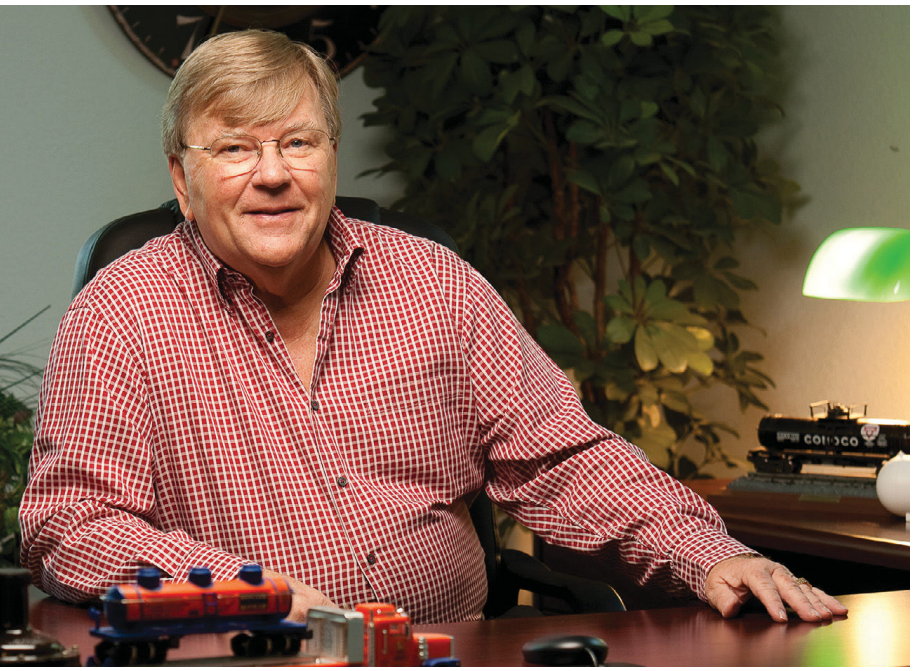


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Ferrellgas

"OH, NO! THE CLAIM'S NOT COVERED!"

FRANK THOMPSON



This statement drives fear into every propane marketer and their insurance agent's heart. However, this statement that a claim is not covered could be you, if you are providing dispenser equipment to a non-owned bottle fill site.

The insurance company wants you and your company to be able to sell more propane. They have asked numerous questions about your safety procedures in order for you to get a quote from them. They must be satisfied that you are capable to sell and deliver propane safely before they insure *you*.

Their quote provides property, general liability, and auto coverage for *your* company. It does not cover the interest of non-owned third parties that utilize your equipment to sell and dispense propane.

An example of this is a propane marketer that installs a dispenser at a non-owned RV park. The dispenser is owned and maintained by the marketer. However, the RV park utilizes one of their employees to fill a customer-owned propane tank. Both the propane marketer and the RV park receive a financial benefit from the agreement.

The problem arises when the RV park is a non-owned third party and the dispenser and general liability *is not* covered under the marketer's insurance policy. Many insurance companies exclude non-owned dispensers because they don't know anything about the risk.

This problem has recently resurfaced when a propane marketer placed his dispenser at a non-owned third-party location, which then had a problem filling a bottle. There was an explosion at the non-owned location that seriously burned their employee and another person, then burned the RV to the ground along with destroying the dispenser. Who *is responsible*?

The marketer's insurance company? The non-owned third-party entity whose employee was trying to fill the propane tank? Whose job was it to train the employee how and when to fill a propane tank? Was there a written contract between the marketer and the non-owned entity? What a mess.

What every marketer should do if you have any owned dispensers placed at a non-owned location:

1. Provide your insurance company with the physical address of the dispenser.
2. Train and document training of all employees authorized to fill propane cylinders.
3. Obtain a written contract that requires the non-owned location, among other things, to insure the propane operation for $1 million per occurrence and provide you with a certificate of insurance naming your company as an additional insured.
4. Decide in advance which party is to insure the dispenser and for how much. If the non-owned location is to insure the equipment, require proof of insurance.
5. Get a hold harmless clause from the non-owned location.

In answer to the question "Who is responsible?" in the above claim, the non-owned location's insurance company took full responsibility. Their reason: *There was a written contract that spelled out the insurance requirements* making the non-owned location's insurance responsible for failing to follow the training to shut off all pilot lights and the vehicle. There was a hold harmless clause, and the contract spelled out who was responsible for the physical damage to the dispenser. The last thing was a well-documented training program provided by the marketer.

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.



WHAT WOULD YOU ATTEMPT IF YOU KNEW YOU COULDN'T FAIL?

NANCY J. COOP

One of my friends says her late husband lived in a world of magical thinking. That may have its own set of rewards and risks. In the world of reality, how far could we imagine ourselves stretching if the risk of failure was not on the table. It seemed that this month's question would be an interesting one to consider.

The VERBATIM column poses 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 presented below are their personal thoughts in response to the question posed above.

THOUGHTS FROM OUR COLLEAGUES

I would backpack the John Muir Trail, the Colorado Trail, from the top of the Grand Canyon in Utah to the bottom in Mexico, and the Appalachian Trail all back to back. I have always loved the outdoors and backpacking. When I was younger those were on my bucket list, but age is catching up to me so that goal is probably out of reach now.

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

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Great question. If you knew you couldn't fail it would take a lot of fun out of attempting most anything. If you go about life attempting things through the lens of learning and development, then do you ever really fail?

But, if I had to pick something I suppose it would be skydiving.

Jim Zuck
Marshall Excelsior Co.
Marshall, Mich.

The thought of pursuing something in life without any chance of failure may be appealing to some. If there were such a reality, would we have achieved so much in our country, our professional and personal lives? We might have many more butterfly therapists in the world, but would that be the world we would want to live in? I suspect not.

The element of risk drives diligence in planning and execution of the pursuit. The greater the risk, the greater the success/reward. I wouldn't want it any other way.

Boyd H. McGathey
Energy Distribution Partners
Parkville, Mo.

I would love to be able to do something that would save someone's life. A few years ago my daughter donated a kidney to her cousin. She never hesitated after making the offer and finding she was compatible, even though she and her husband had three young children at home and was working as a Special Education Coordinator. Not only did her sacrifice save my nephew's life, but it was such a rewarding experience for everyone involved. She was an inspiration to me, and I wish that I could do something so wonderful for someone!

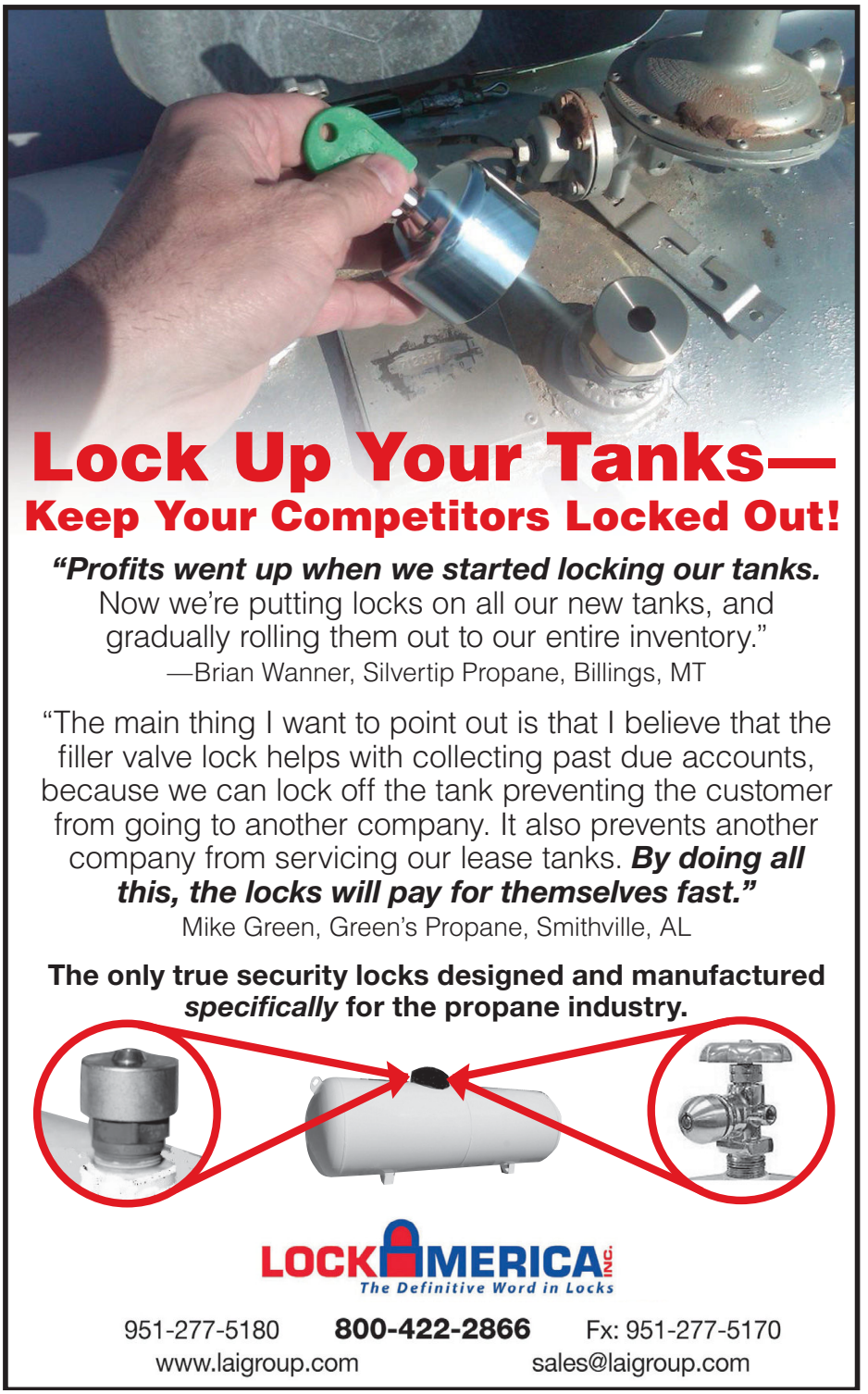
Rosie Buschur
McMahan's Bottle Gas
Dayton, Ohio

So, my first off-the-cuff impulse was to say I would run out and buy a lottery ticket—then maybe go hang gliding. Somehow those did not feel like the correct answer for me.

As I thought about this question, really thought about it, here's my final answer… My "No Fail Wish" would be to serve God. Ten years ago I walked away from Him, but through his grace and a broken but blessed path back I find myself wanting a closer relationship with Him. Crazy, maybe, but I'll keep you all in my prayers

Judy Taranovich
Proctor Gas
Proctor, Vt.

I would get back into flipping houses. I started a company in early 2000 called InSide-Out where I purchased and resold property before the real estate bubble burst in 2007. If someone would have told me before 2007 that purchasing real estate would have consequences, I would have thought they lived in a bubble! If I knew 100% I would not fail, I would definitely get back into this. The short-term investment both financially and personally offers such a generous reward, not to mention the satisfaction





APPLY TO THE NPGF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM!

The National Propane Gas Foundation (NPGF) offers college scholarships to children of employees who work at NPGA or state propane gas association member companies.

NPGF offers $1,000 and $2,000 scholarships to students who intend to pursue continuing education through two-year and four-year colleges as well as vocational, technical, and trade school programs.

The National Propane Gas Foundation Scholarship Program opens **September 15, 2020**, and closes **February 15, 2021**.

Email info@npga.org to obtain your company NPGA member number.

For more information on eligibility visit: https://bit.ly/NPGF-Info

Start your application today at https://bit.ly/NPGF-Apply

Have questions or want to donate to the scholarship program? Contact the NPGA Scholarship Coordinator at 202.466.7200 or email scholarship@npga.org

NPGF
NATIONAL PROPANE GAS FOUNDATION
SCHOLARSHIP FUND

which comes from tapping into my passion to decorate.

Hayley Karicofe
AmeriGas
Churchville, Va.

I believe anything that doesn't kill me makes me stronger. I have the injuries to prove it from when I tried to teach myself how to jump hills on my dirt bike. Since that injury I haven't had the courage to attempt it again. If I knew that I could make a motorcycle soar through the air, without killing myself, then I would love to do that.

Jason Soulon
Westmor Industries
Shawnee, Kan.

If failure was not possible, what would be worth doing? How much effort would be needed to achieve it? Fear of failure is a great motivator, whether the outcome affects others or only me.

Bruce Swiecicki
National Propane Gas Association
Tinley Park, Ill.

I would jump out of an airplane (with a parachute) and acquire as many businesses as I could each year!

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

If I knew I would not fail because I had the patience, intelligence, and talent, I would learn to play the piano. One of my regrets in life is that I enjoy music yet cannot play a musical instrument. With all the challenges presented by the pandemic, it would be relaxing to sit and play music. I am amazed at the ability my grandchildren have acquired at a young age. Hopefully it will last a lifetime. This may seem to be a minor accomplishment, however at my age I recognize that the simple things in life seem to provide the greatest satisfaction.

Gary France
France Propane Service
Schofield, Wis.

THE VALUE OF FAILURE

No matter what your own response is to this question, you've now read some ideas that may inspire more thoughts on the topic. I've been impressed by people I've known who were grateful for failure and the lessons learned. We often have the capacity to move forward if we learn well. I'll sign off with these two quotes:

"The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure."—John C. Maxwell

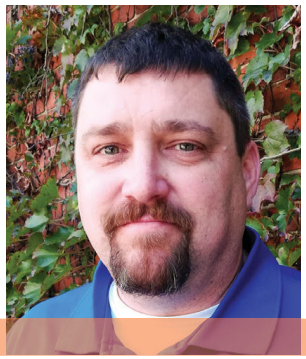
"Success is most often achieved by those who don't know that failure is inevitable."—Coco Chanel

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



NPGA
NATIONAL PROPANE GAS ASSOCIATION
AFFINITY PROGRAM PROVIDER



USE DRIVER SAFETY EVALUATIONS TO REDUCE RISK, IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

BRENT CAMMETT

Propane marketers across the country are gearing up for the busiest time of the year. As colder weather approaches, your propane drivers will be making more deliveries and dealing with poor driving conditions. It is critical to ensure that your propane delivery drivers have the training they need to complete their routes safely and efficiently. Ride-along driver evaluations are an invaluable training tool that propane companies can use to evaluate individual driver skills, maintain compliance protocols, and protect the company from expensive accidents and unnecessary safety hazards.

If you are looking for ways to maximize the value of your propane safety training, driver safety evaluations are a great way to ensure your team members get the training they need without losing billable hours.

Ride-along driver evaluations offer a unique opportunity for your employees to receive critical training during regular business hours. The training professional will come to your business location and ride along with the trainee during their regular route. Drivers benefit from one-on-one training and receive real-time feedback and the management team is provided with valuable insight on employee performance and future training opportunities.

Here are the four main reasons to prioritize ride-along driver safety evaluations this fall or winter:

Make the most of your propane training budget. Unlike other training that can take employees away from daily operations, ride-along driver evaluations are conducted while drivers are performing their regular duties on their scheduled delivery routes. No need to rearrange your drivers' schedules or worry about losing out on productivity. Plus, any identified improvements or issues will help your team increase future efficiencies.

Evaluate employee performance and identify training needs. Ride-along propane driver evaluations are designed to benefit your delivery drivers and your management personnel. Ride-alongs allow trainers to see how delivery drivers operate on a day-to-day basis. They can evaluate where each driver is excelling and where there could be room for improvement. After the training session, management receives a detailed report of each driver's performance conducting their daily tasks and any recommendations for training as needed.



Complete risk management review of propane installations. An additional, yet greatly significant benefit of ride-along driver evaluations is that during the training you can also have your trainer complete on-site propane customer audits. Trainers can audit each installation visited along the delivery route based on NFPA 58 code requirements and identify any installations with compliance issues.

Protect your drivers and your propane company. Bobtail accidents are extremely dangerous. They can put the driver and your company at risk. Just one accident could cost your company upwards of thousands of dollars in equipment damage and potential personal injury costs. During a ride-along driver evaluation, your drivers can learn best practices to help avoid accidents.

If you are weighing cost and efficiency as deciding factors for your fall and winter training program, consider how ride-along driver evaluations can return your investment on both. Make the most of your busy season and use this time to your advantage by giving your drivers critical training without sacrificing billable hours or productivity. It's a win-win for your team and your company. To learn more about ride-along driver evaluations offered by P3 Propane Safety, visit *p3propane.com*.

Brent Cammett, senior consultant of safety and training at P3 Propane Safety, has 20 years of industry experience. He has led multistate safety programs, conducted and instructed safety training, completed safety audits, and investigated incidents across New England. He is a CETP instructor, proctor, and skills evaluator and a licensed Smith Systems driver trainer.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19, WINTER

PAT THORNTON

Chris Caywood, owner and president of Caywood Propane Gas, Inc. (Albion, Coldwater, and Hudson, Mich.) was attending an NBA basketball game with National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) Benchmarking colleagues in Texas in March when a notice he saw on his cell phone told him that the basketball season was coming to an abrupt halt. A player on another NBA team had tested positive for the coronavirus. The game between the Dallas Mavericks and the Denver Nuggets continued to its completion and Mavericks owner Mark Cuban was caught on television at the game learning about the suspension of the season on his cell phone just as Caywood had. "I told my benchmarking colleagues that we were attending the last basketball game of the year," Caywood later told ***BPN***.

In Maryland, Jeff Petrash, vice president and general counsel of NPGA, returned from a week's vacation in March to news that a quarantine would require him and other employees to work from home for the foreseeable future. He has not returned to NPGA's Washington, D.C., office since then and his usually busy travel schedule slowed to a halt.



Paraco has seen propane as a product that is saving businesses and a product that is bringing families together.

Photos these pages courtesy Paraco Gas

Caywood and Petrash, who both have law degrees, would soon be using their legal knowledge in new and different ways to help themselves and fellow industry members navigate a new challenge: COVID-19. For Caywood, taking all necessary precautions for a retail propane operation would become a priority, and exchanging and comparing best practices with benchmarking colleagues would come with the territory. For Petrash, the "general counsel" part of his title would also mean advising industry members as well as resolving urgent situations on behalf of the association.

AS THE PANDEMIC HIT...

"It was suddenly all-hands-on-deck," Petrash recalled. "We had over a dozen contracts related to the NPGA Expo in Nashville to renegotiate. We had the sudden realization that supply challenges could arise fast if demand for crude oil and natural gas dropped quickly. And, of course, we had our membership needing answers on all matters of how to handle a variety of situations. To add to the challenge, we had to face these challenges with everyone working remotely."

In Michigan, Caywood was soon cancelling travel plans for several months and discussing with employees new protocols to protect themselves and their customers. "With changing consumer habits, we were already moving toward more contactless customer relationships. We had been making a push for more digital interaction options to be adopted by customers. COVID-19 has only increased the interest in contactless interaction with us," he said.

"We are in a much better position supply-wise than we thought we might be back in April," Petrash said in a discussion with ***BPN*** in mid-October. As for future concerns, Petrash said we've learned a lot about COVID-19 since April, but it will remain a challenge until there is a silver bullet treatment or vaccine.

"In April, we were successful in getting most of our retail personnel classified as critical employees with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS); we obtained numerous face masks from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for companies throughout the industry; and we collected and posted a lot of important documents about policies and procedures from various agencies including the Centers for Dis-



ease Control (CDC) in the members section of our website," Petrash said. "Throughout the summer, we monitored and addressed wholesale supply concerns. With the threat of much lower production, four webinars were created to educate retail members on the best practices for dealing with all phases of the supply management process."

AS WINTER APPROACHES...

As we move forward, Petrash is pleased that by mid-October, production in the U.S. was expected to be approximately 2.2 MMbbld while demand is expected to be in the 2.1 MMbbld area. "So, with less concern about having adequate supply, infrastructure and distribution are key," he said. "The human factor is critical to keeping the infrastructure working." Petrash stressed the importance of keeping drivers and other essential personnel healthy as much as possible. "Following CDC guidelines, maintaining social distancing, wearing masks, washing hands thoroughly, and limiting interaction with customers to what is absolutely essential are critical," he said. "A lot of productivity is lost with one driver sick. With a contagious disease that spreads quickly, it is so important to keep staff members from spreading the disease to one another."

On the financial side, he noted that retail propane companies may experience collections issues with commercial accounts struggling and many residential customers out of work or working fewer hours. "We have not heard about a lot of problems yet, but it has not been wintertime since the pandemic began," he said. "The natural gas and electric industries are likely experiencing tougher collections issues because they tend to bill more after usage than propane providers." He noted that government requirements that natural gas and electric customers not be cut off in certain circumstances have caused stocks for many of these providers to fall. "Uncollectible debt tends to be spread across the board. Propane companies will likely need to take a stricter stance on credit worthiness and collections."

NOT YET TIME TO DECLARE VICTORY

"I think we need to be wary of those who are declaring COVID-19 defeated," Caywood said. "This is not a time to be landing a fighter plane on a carrier and celebrating victory like we did 100 days after the start of the Iraq war in 2003." While he is happy the death rate has declined, he notes that new cases are up 40% to 50% in Michigan. "At the same time, we have a population that has become complacent because the disease is less lethal. And, quite frankly, people are tired of the disease and are willing to take more risks. In Michigan, the governor's orders were declared unconstitutional in October as more citizens just don't want to be required to follow them anymore. It's harder for us to require customers to continue to follow safety precautions, but we continue to do it and it's worth it."

Caywood feels that after the disease has truly run its course, business owners should establish or modify infectious disease protocols. "If we as business owners don't take steps on our own, we will be regulated more," he said. "It will come about when lawsuits start to happen. Any one of us in the propane industry could potentially be sued if a death occurs and the company is blamed for not following CDC recommendations." Other protocols Caywood envisions include having a plan if multiple employees become sick at the same time. "Perhaps other locations within the same company can pick up the slack. Smaller companies may have to work closely with another provider, likely a competitor, to keep customer's tanks filled." Caywood believes that if propane companies are proactive about having infectious disease protocols, government officials will be less likely to create the protocols for the companies. "This is a real opportunity to show regulators that we are capable of self-regulation!"

IN FLORIDA...

In Orlando, Fla., Lovelace Gas faced a dilemma when one member of the family-owned business, Alina Hanna, suddenly had her children's school make the quick switch to remote learning. "Suddenly my daughter Alina was faced with having to be at home helping my grandchildren with their schooling," said Lucinda Lovelace. Lovelace Gas is owned by her husband Garry and brother-in-law Bill. She and the company leadership decided that perhaps the best plan would be for her to fill in for her daughter at the company. "I hadn't been in the workplace for 38 years. I was busy raising children for many of those years, but this has been an interesting seven months. I was not only learning a job, but learning a job during a pandemic where some of the longtime procedures were being turned upside down."

Lovelace said she feels blessed that only one employee had



Blue Ridge Energy provided detailed information about reopening its office lobbies in early October.

Photos these pages courtesy Blue Ridge Energy

been diagnosed with COVID-19 and has since recovered. "The employee is a service tech who is also a firefighter. He came in contact with the virus in his firefighter role. We've been pretty diligent about our social distancing rules, so we're glad we prevented a spread of the disease to other staff members or customers." Masks, stickers on the floor encouraging distancing, only one entrance, and contactless cylinder refills are major new protocols at Lovelace Gas. "We're seeing people exercising caution throughout the area. Restaurants are reopened but people aren't flocking to them," she said. "I am noticing that people are settling in to the new normal more now than in the beginning. They are more accepting of the recommendations and requirements that will keep them from getting or sharing the virus."

IN OHIO...

At McMahan's Bottle Gas (Dayton, Ohio), manager Brian Buschur said the ever-changing COVID-19 situation is causing companies to be more flexible. "We've had a location shut down for a period of time while several office personnel got COVID-19, quarantined at home, and recovered," Buschur said. "This happened despite employees using masks, hand sanitizer, and practicing social distancing. In the meantime, we saw our cylinder business double overnight as people were staying home so much more."

Further north in Ohio, George Walton serves as both president and chief operating officer of Prism Propane (North Baltimore, Ohio) and president and CEO of Hancock Wood Electric Cooperative (North Baltimore, Ohio). The electric cooperative is a nonprofit company owned by the members served, while the propane company is a for-profit entity owned by the electric cooperative.

"Initially we closed the offices of both companies, and office personnel managed the companies from their homes for a couple of months," Walton said. The operation employees' hours for Prism and Hancock Wood were staggered for nearly four months to keep crews more socially distanced. "When we reopened the offices, employees were required to maintain social distancing requirements and had to perform self-medical evaluations from home each morning to ensure that there were no symptoms of the COVID-19 virus. We only had one employee get COVID-19. He was an employee on the electric side whose wife worked at a hospital and got it first. He quarantined at home for 14 days and returned to work after testing negative."

When COVID-19 first hit, Walton said there were some negative impacts on propane sales, mostly stemming from commercial accounts cutting their operations back. In some cases, commercial accounts were operating at 50% production. A big loss was due to schools closing down. "The need for autogas to fuel the buses immediately died," Walton explained. "All this came at the end of a mild winter in which sales were already down 12%. We had to cut some costs and freeze some forecasted expenditures in the budgets as a precautionary measure."

"The electric side saw an 8% decrease through the end of June, but two hot summer months in July and August helped make up for it," Walton said. "Both sides applied for Paycheck Protection Plans (PPPs) and received several thousand dollars, which helped make up for lost sales. The PPPs have been critical to minimizing the impact on the businesses due to reduced sales. Based on the Ohio governor's order, restaurants and other businesses are still required to operate at 50% customer capacity in their facilities, which limits the number of potential customers that can come into their stores. Restaurants are losing money and if more PPP money is not available, some of these restaurants will be closing their doors for good this winter."

Walton noted that while it is unfortunate that many people lost jobs in the area, he was pleased that the increased pool of prospective employees brought some really good new hires to Prism Propane and the Hancock Wood Electric Cooperative. "We are pleased to have some new team members who are an excellent fit at the propane company and the cooperative."

IN WISCONSIN...

During October, amid a spike in cases in Wisconsin, ***BPN*** spoke to small business owner Gary France of France Propane Service (Schofield, Wis.). France is also a past chairman of the NPGA. “Keeping employees safe is critical to a small business,” he said. “An outbreak would affect our ability to do customer deliveries, so we are staying ahead of schedule as much as possible. We are trying to keep employees upbeat with a focus on running with a commonsense attitude.” Regarding NPGA, France believes postponing the NPGA Expo to October 2021 was a good plan and he was pleased with the educational supply planning webinars provided during the summer. “Complacency feeds disaster. I’m glad we’re focused on a commonsense and responsible attitude to get us to the finish line with this pandemic.”



IN NORTH CAROLINA...

Blue Ridge Energy, an electric cooperative with a propane and fuels subsidiary, provided detailed information about reopening its office lobbies in early October. According to the news release, special measures were being taken to protect visitors and employees as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. Visitors are limited to 10 at a time and all visitors are required to wear a mask and observe social distancing of at least six feet. Personalized showroom appointments continue to be available by calling ahead to schedule a time.

To reduce risks, the company implemented the use of contactless tools such as an office drive-through, kiosks at each office and community locations, the website with “my account” log in, and a customer service phone line. Assistance with energy bills is offered through the “In This Together” COVID-19 Crisis Relief Fund. Residents can call their local helping agency or go to the page about relief on Blue Ridge Energy’s website. It was announced that while discontinuations have been extended past the governor’s timeline, they were reinstated in October. Furthermore, touch-free sanitizing areas are being placed at entrance/exit areas; mask requirements are enforced, and masks are available for those who need them; clear acrylic sneeze guards for lobby customer service areas have been installed; social distancing markers are placed on lobby floors; and single-chair seating for waiting will be available.

According to Renee Whitener, director of public relations, Blue Ridge Energy’s main focus has been to take all precautions to ensure the safety of employees and customers. “Prior to our offices reopening on Oct. 5, we allowed private showroom appointments beginning in May so that consumers could still purchase products we sell (such as gas logs, water heaters, etc.) while offices were closed to the general public. Masks and safe distancing were required and this was discussed with the customer when their appointment was scheduled.”

Whitener said there are also similar safety protocols for outside operations so that delivery employees and service technicians have minimal exposure risks as well. “Customers have been very appreciative of the steps we have taken to continue to provide great service in a manner that ensures the highest level of precautionary measures are in place to maintain operations through COVID-19.”





Photo courtesy Tom Clark

Tom Clark, Rocky Mountain Propane Gas Association, reports that it varies from state to state how many people can gather in a class.

IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS...

BPN spoke with Tom Clark, executive director of the Rocky Mountain Propane Gas Association, which includes the states of Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana. "We developed a plan whereby marketers would send staff to assist other companies in the event of a quarantine of several employees at one particular company," Clark said. "I doubt we will have to use this plan, but our members have the peace of mind that there will be help if needed."

Clark mentioned that many members throughout his four-state region are limiting the number of people who come through the front door of the company office. "We are also very mindful that requirements and restrictions vary from state to state and county to county," he said. "In our CETP training, it varies from state to state how many people can gather in a class. Generally, we are having to do smaller meetings."

"The state propane executives are not able to get together in person for the time being, but I feel we are closer than ever through regular monthly calls," Clark said. "We are currently doing six weeks of two-hour online meetings in lieu of a longer in-person meeting that we have most years."

IN THE NORTH CENTRAL AREA...

Derek Dalling, president and CEO of Kindsvatter, Dalling and Associates, heads the Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana Propane Gas Associations. "From an impact standpoint, obviously the lack of meetings in person cannot be understated. All of us are now on Zoom fatigue," he said. "There is only so much that can be accomplished over a conference call or a Zoom meeting. And so much more gets accomplished when there is the personal contact with each other. We are getting things accomplished, but we definitely miss seeing and meeting with our members." Dalling noted that he is seeing a lot of interest in digital communication among retail propane marketers. "We have seen a lot more members engage with the association, we saw more and more members using social media—some probably for the first time. We had members inquire about credit card resources to add that capability or expand it for their customers."

Dalling said cylinder sales have definitely increased across the membership of his associations. "With COVID hitting in spring forcing people home, we heard of record sales for the spring months," he said. "[The soaring sales of cylinders] makes sense with people staying home, working there, and having kids learning from home. That also led to more people cooking on grills and using cylinders for outdoor living. With all that, we heard of touchless cylinder sales, retailers adjusting cylinder fill processes, having people stay in their vehicles, and more portable credit card paying options."

IN NEW YORK AND SURROUNDING STATES...

"This has been a unique experience," said Christina Armentano, third generation and executive vice president at Paraco (Rye Brook, N.Y.), "Customer behavior has changed as a result of the pandemic. Telecommuting and virtual school programs have had a dramatic impact on residential usage to start," she added. "We have also observed a spike in the overall outdoor living category as the coronavirus cancelled summer vacations and travel plans for many at home. We've seen an increase in demand for barbecue grills, outdoor heaters, firepits, and pools. All of this adds more propane usage at home."

Armentano and Andy Mirchin, national accounts manager with 35 years of experience at Paraco, visited with ***BPN*** about proactive things retail propane marketers can be doing to showcase the unique ways propane can be used in these circumstances. "In my 35 years, I can't think of another time where propane played a more crucial role in keeping people in business," Mirchin said. "With restaurants not able to operate at capacity, many are adding space outside. This may be outdoors or in a large tent, but it is allowing for more space to serve more customers safely." Armentano feels propane is the unsung hero of the mom-and-pop businesses in the restaurant industry.

Mirchin stressed that Paraco treats all cylinder exchange providers it works with as partners. "We are always working with our partners to look for ways propane can be a solution for critical needs that people have. The pandemic has brought out some of those needs." Together with their partners, Armentano and Mirchin have seen propane as a product that is saving businesses and a product that is bringing families together. "My heart goes out to all those impacted by the pandemic," Armentano said. "But, if there is a silver lining, it is that more and more people are seeing the benefits propane can provide at a time when there are forces trying to steer people away from propane with electricity and other energy sources." ■

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES

PAT THORNTON

"There are some in propane who believe that training only needs to be given to people who handle propane, but what about people who handle people?" In the June webinar series hosted by Virtual Propane Expo (VPE), Paula Laney, director of safety for Energy Distribution Partners (EDP; Chicago), discussed the important role customer service representatives (CSRs) play in the propane industry. Her webinar was titled, "5 Critical CSR Mistakes Every Propane Company Makes and How to Fix It."

Laney listed five common mistakes a CSR can make:

1. Making assumptions about the caller's situation before getting all the facts.
2. Failing to treat an emergency or priority call as an emergency.
3. Not remaining calm during emergency calls and not delivering the necessary and complete safety message to the customer.
4. Being an "order taker" rather than taking the time to understand the needs or situation of the customer.
5. Avoiding or ignoring opportunities to learn more about propane and propane applications that could benefit their customers.

Laney grew up in her family's retail propane business, Liberty Propane Gas (Cookson, Okla.), working in many roles. She then spent nearly 20 years as director of safety, education, and training for the Oklahoma LP Gas Research, Marketing and Safety Commission before moving to her current role with EDP.

"Every employee plays a role in safety," Laney said on the webinar. "How CSRs respond to customers can be the difference between life and death."

"CSRs are the first line of communication with customers and it is very important that they give customers the correct and complete information they need quickly," she explained. A common example is the customer who calls and says, "I smell gas." The CSR should never tell the customer not to worry, according to Laney, as this might give a false sense that everything is okay. "The customer should be instructed to evacuate the house or facility until it has been checked out by a professional and the situation is remedied."

Laney commented that often propane middle managers and field managers "retrain" CSRs to cut corners in handling concerned customers to not disrupt their workflow. "Propane company owners need to make sure this is not allowed to happen by having all staff members fully understand company protocols for handling customer safety matters and the dangers that could ensue when shortcuts are taken."

"It is important that a CSR be able to handle an urgent safety concern and not have to have the customer wait for a higher level manager to return a call," she said. "Also, telling a customer to 'just Google it' is never a good idea. It is a red flag that a company is not safety-focused or prepared."

In a discussion with ***BPN*** after the webinar, Laney estimated the likely percentage of companies training CSRs effectively across the retail propane industry. "Just five years ago I would have said maybe 20% of propane companies were investing in training their CSRs adequately. This need has been championed by me and many others such as John Hansen, Mike Walters, Eric Kuster, and Stuart Flatow, and it has gained a lot of ground."

"There is a growing awareness in our industry of how critical a CSR is to the handling of priority calls. PERC has a new *Office Personnel: Safety and Sales for Customer Service Representatives* training course now in the Learning Center that makes this training more accessible than ever before. By the end of the summer, I think the number of propane companies that are adequately training their CSRs will be closer to 50% to 60%. Internally here at EDP, employee training is a priority and we require all CSRs to complete PERC's *Office Personnel* course as part of the onboarding/training process

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"How CSRs respond to customers can be the difference between life and death," said Paula Laney, director of safety for Energy Distribution Partners.

VPE VIRTUAL PROPANE EXPO
CONNECT. LEARN. TRANSACT.

Marketing in the New Normal

Presented by: Gary Corbett

June 24, 2020



MEETING THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S CUSTOMERS

PAT THORNTON

For the past several years, the "new normal" in marketing has centered around digital communications and new opportunities presented by technology, especially with the dawn of smartphone use, to communicate with customers.

In the year 2020, the availability of digital marketing brought a lot of new adopters as COVID-19 became a threat to people around the world.

"Suddenly, my father, who was used to ordering food by phone to pick up, was using DoorDash to order and pay for food with contactless delivery," said Gary Corbett of Warm Thoughts Communications. Corbett presented a webinar titled "Marketing in the New Normal" during the Virtual Propane Expo in late June. "For those who were behind in tech-

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Socialize

- ✓ Facebook would be the largest country in the world
- ✓ Facebook Ad revenue is skyrocketing
- ✓ Prospects come to see who you are, what you're like
- ✓ You can push out messages to engage them, build relationships, manage reputation and attract new business

DON'T

Assign it to just anyone who knows Facebook
Post only business or only social
Fail to respond quickly to negative reviews
Buy likes from wholesalers
Post too little
Get into a fight online

DO

Mix content about community, personal, and business
Pay attention to metrics
Post multiple times per week
Proactively drive reviews
Use as a communication line during crises
Get creative
Take conflicts offline
Advertise



The showroom was the center of attention during an Aug. 1 open house celebrating Holtzman Propane's new location in Tappahannock, Va.

SHOWROOM PROVIDES PROPANE EXPERIENCE, PERSONAL TOUCH

STEVE RELYEA

At a newly opened propane appliance showroom in Virginia, visitors can enjoy a coffee bar with hot water supplied by a tankless water heater, view different fireplace vignettes, and relax under a pergola while gathered around a grill island or a fire pit. The showroom was the center of attention during an Aug. 1 open house celebrating Holtzman Propane's new location in Tappahannock.

The Tappahannock branch is the fourth retail propane location operated in Virginia by Holtzman Propane and it is the second opened just this year. All the branches offer fireplaces, inserts, space heaters, and hot water heaters. Each is a one-stop shop offering propane appliance sales, installation, service, and repair. Each also features a showroom to showcase the equipment that is offered.

"The Tappahannock office is located on a main thoroughfare connecting northern Virginia with our service area," Jennifer White, district manager, told ***BPN***. "We have a lot of customers with second homes on the water,



Because this branch has a lot of customers with second homes on the water, the showroom features both standard hearth product offerings and outdoor living spaces.



Jennifer White, district manager, delivered the opening remarks. "We're always looking to serve small communities," she later told ***BPN***.



Among those hosting the event were Holtzman Propane's salesman for the Tidewater district, Tim Rhodes; general manager, Todd Holtzman; and regional manager, Donald Hornor.

so in addition to our standard hearth product offerings, we included outdoor living spaces in our showroom design. We offer our community the shopping experience they deserve. Just because they're in a small town shouldn't mean they have to travel to a large metropolitan area to visit a quality retail showroom."

"Some bigger companies don't have showrooms and are not open to the public," said Donald Hornor, regional manager. "By us having them, we can deliver that personal touch. People can come in and see me and see Jennifer. As much as things have gone online, people still want to touch the products and talk with the same people they've talked with before."

BENEFITTING THE COMMUNITY

During the grand opening celebration, town leaders and residents enjoying the get-together told the Holtzman Propane team, "We're so glad you're here." A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held July 31, followed by the open house on Aug. 1. The event included free food and drinks, product demos, and showroom tours. A local radio station held a live broadcast. A fire truck was parked outside for children to enjoy. Prizes contributed by Holtzman Propane and other local businesses were raffled off and the proceeds were donated to the Tappahannock-Essex Volunteer Fire Department.

Due to the coronavirus, masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer were on hand for all to use and enough staff were there to ensure these were kept readily available. Grab bags were given out; as a precaution, they were handed out individually rather than being distributed in a free-for-all.

Throughout the celebration, all the propane appliances were operating.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SHOWROOM

"A showroom is an important part of full-service marketing, selling burner tips, and meeting the people," said industry veteran Randy Doyle, who has been helping Holtzman Propane expand into new markets. "A frontline retail-like presence is one of the propane marketer's enduring principles of success."

He explained Holtzman's three goals for its showrooms. First, the propane experience: "Customers want to know propane and experience propane," Doyle said. "The best way to do that is, before making a purchase, come in and experience the live burn and have someone explain the benefits with the appliance on hand." Second, human capital: "Employees with local relations who are confident propane experts speaking directly with the customer." Third, community commitment through an attractive Main Street presence: "A common theme from community leaders at the open house was their appreciation for raising the image of their community."

Each of Holtzman Propane's four propane locations has different demographics and requires a different product mix, White noted, "but we're always looking to serve small communities." She said the newest showroom was designed to feel like home and to help visitors imagine what the appliances would contribute to their own home. "You can see and hear the tankless water heater next to the sink and see how quickly the hot water gets there," she pointed out.

"You can't get that experience on a video," White added. "The kinds of things we sell are best purchased when you can look at it and get input from employees about what is best for your home. Would you buy a thousand-dollar gas log based on a picture?"

"Delivering on this caliber of experience for the customer is difficult, but is worth doing," Hornor concluded. "That helps us retain our customers and gain new ones." ■

GAGNE LEADS NPGA DURING YEAR OF UNCHARTED TERRITORY

PAT THORNTON

When Denis Gagne accepted the election to the role of treasurer of the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) three years ago, he knew he was making a five-year commitment as an officer, including a year as chairman in 2020. Typically, the role of chairman is a big year of travel, but nobody told Gagne he would not have to travel much. A people person who enjoys face-to-face meetings, he had no early indication 2020 would involve almost no such meetings. Gagne was prepared for a lot of travel and in-person discussions with industry members all over the country, but the COVID-19 outbreak had other plans. "I've been on a lot of video meetings in the past seven months," he said. "We'd rather be face-to-face, but Zoom has been a tool that has helped us to move forward."

Gagne grew up in the propane business. His family had a small retail propane business and when the family sold its business to Eastern Propane (Rochester, N.H.) in 1976, Gagne went with the business. "My kids say it's not fair that I've never been to a job interview in my life," he said of his two sons who have built careers outside of the propane industry. His wife of 47 years, Marybeth, a retired teacher, has been active in leading the NPGA Scholarship Fund for several years and currently chairs the Scholarship Committee.

"Denis is a very important part of our leadership team," said Tom Manson, CEO of Eastern Propane. "He has strong experience in every aspect of the propane business including acquisitions, supply, sales, and marketing. He is a mentor to all in the company, a well-rounded individual, and a wonderful human being." Manson said that Gagne is also a mentor to the entire industry, noting that Gagne's decision to serve as an NPGA officer was made with full support of the leadership of Eastern Propane. "It was agreed that Denis would take this role just before retiring from his many years with the company. He has a wealth of knowledge and experience to share with younger people who join our company as well as people in all segments of the propane industry."

One younger executive is Josh Anderson, vice president of marketing and business development, who is a member of the family that owns Eastern Propane. "I've worked with Denis extensively since joining the company," he said. "We've worked on acquisitions traveling together a lot and I have had a chance to run a lot of ideas by him. I always appreciate his honesty. Denis is always willing to help by sharing knowledge and experience he has gained over 40-plus years."

While willing to share his experience, Gagne feels he still learns much more from the people he interacts with throughout the industry. "The great thing about our NPGA officers is the diversity we all bring to the table as a group," Gagne said. "We represent a variety of different roles in companies large and small from every corner of the United States. It is always

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Denis and Marybeth Gagne

BLIND AD LEADS DIXON TO PROPANE CAREER AND PERC CHAIRMANSHIP

PAT THORNTON

Daniel Dixon responded to a blind ad placed by a headhunter for a financial consultant position in 1997 while living in Kansas City. He had no idea the industry was propane and the company was Propane Resources (Mission, Kan.). "Turned out to be a great opportunity for me at the time and I have loved the propane industry ever since," Dixon said, speaking to ***BPN*** about his new role as chairman of the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC). "The industry is full of great companies, people, and principles. I've been fortunate to meet people from all over the country in my time at Propane Resources and AmeriGas."

Having earned an undergraduate degree in accounting and an MBA, Dixon first applied his financial background in the transportation and banking fields before joining the propane industry. During his 16 years at Propane Resources, he focused on helping retailers with financial, operational, and merger and acquisition services. Over the past seven years, he has been group director of business development at AmeriGas, where his team focuses on acquiring well-run retail propane companies nationwide. He and his wife Kristi live in Florence, Ala., and have three children ranging in ages from 14 to 25.

Dixon said the number of leaders in the propane industry he has learned from is too many to list. "The first was Dwain Willingham (founder of Propane Resources) who allowed me to learn the industry and do everything from A to Z," Dixon said. "Spending a week with Midwestern Propane (Belleville, Ill.) setting tanks, delivering cylinders, riding in a bobtail, and setting routes back in 1997 was very beneficial. Spending time talking with Hugh Gallagher, Ann Kelly, Tony Rosback, and many others at AmeriGas about propane and business subjects has also taught me a lot." He also cited the many industry members he has met through volunteer roles as being important in his ongoing learning.



"Never underestimate what our industry can do when we work together," said Daniel Dixon, chairman of PERC.

Dixon has been active in the Alabama Propane Gas Association (APGA) for many years and he served a term as the association president. Continued involvement led to leadership roles in both the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) and PERC as well. He has served on both the NPGA board and the executive committee. "I enjoy giving back to an industry that has given me so much," he said. "I had always been interested in PERC, and some fellow AmeriGas employees recommended I apply to be a councilor. PERC has been fortunate to have some great individuals serve that always have an 'industry first' attitude. Being involved in two strategic plans, as well as many growth opportunities that have been created, is something I am very proud of."

As for goals, Dixon notes the recently created strategic plan that focuses on developing world-class safety and training, increasing propane's voice in the national energy conversation, growing the autogas market, and engaging in commercialization efforts to create market growth opportunities. "Along with our 'Propane Can Do That' digital media plan, the Council believes we can focus the industry's financial commitment of more money on fewer projects and have success. The metrics available to track our success have never been more readily available," Dixon said. He is pleased to say the pandemic has not slowed PERC's ability to move forward with its many projects. "Tucker, Bridget, Cinch [Tucker Perkins, president and CEO; Bridget Kidd, senior vice president, industry relations; and Cinch Munson, senior vice president, business development] and the staff at PERC have worked extremely hard to not let up on the forward progress that has been made the past few years. Many video and phone calls have taken the place of face-to-face visits. We are very happy with their focus these past seven-plus months."

Stronger collaboration between PERC and NPGA as well as the state propane associations has been a priority of all the organizations in the face of the electrify everything movement as well as decarbonization. "Both Tucker and Steve

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Photo courtesy Suburban Propane and Oberon Fuels

SUBURBAN PROPANE, OBERON FUELS TO BRING NEW FUELS TO MARKET

STEVE RELYEA

While continuing to promote propane autogas as a clean fuel for transportation, Suburban Propane Partners LP (Whippany, N.J.) is also supporting the development of an even cleaner, renewable alternative.

The company has acquired a 39% stake in Oberon Fuels (San Diego, Calif.), a development-stage producer of renewable dimethyl ether (rDME) transportation fuel. Suburban Propane has also committed to provide additional funding to support continuing development efforts to begin commercializing an rDME/propane blended product. The company will have the exclusive rights to work with Oberon to market and sell rDME and rDME/propane blends in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The initial customers for the blends are likely to be over-the-road transportation fleets, especially those that are in California and those that are already fueled by autogas. "There are plenty of fleets to go after and the low-carbon fuel incentives are most advanced in California," Michael Stivala, president and CEO of Suburban Propane, told ***BPN***. He said other customers may include fleets that are using diesel or gasoline, but want to convert to a lower-carbon alternative fuel.

Rebecca Boudreaux, Ph.D., president and CEO of Oberon Fuels, added, "We are expanding the use of DME because it is recognized as a powerful way to decarbonize transportation, and the propane industry is well prepared to distribute it."

WHAT IS rDME?

DME is a synthetically produced fuel that can be generated from natural gas or biogas. Like propane, it can be stored as a liquid under moderate pressure. It has been used around the world for three decades. In Asia, it is blended



Photo courtesy Oberon Fuels

with propane and used as a cooking fuel. In the U.S. and Europe, it is used as an aerosol propellant. DME is also being investigated as a diesel alternative for passenger cars and agricultural equipment. rDME blends are being tested in autogas vehicles, and Boudreaux expects they can be used there with no modifications to the vehicles or infrastructure.

rDME produced from food waste has a carbon intensity (CI) score of -5, and rDME produced from dairy manure has a CI score of -278. “The carbon intensity depends on the feedstock,” Boudreaux explained. “Dairy manure, for example, is normally flushed into a pond and its emissions are released into the atmosphere.”

When it is instead used to produce dairy manure-based rDME and then combined with propane, it lowers propane’s CI score. Propane has a CI score of 83. With a 5% blend of rDME, propane’s CI score can be lowered to 65, and with a 20% blend, it can be lowered to 11.

ANNUAL PRODUCTION OF 1.6 MMGAL. EXPECTED

Oberon Fuels, which was founded in 2010 and began producing fuel-grade DME in 2013, expects to begin production of rDME from pulp mill waste in 2021. The annual production capacity is estimated at 1.6 million gallons.

While there is a lot of work to be done to get production off the ground and to introduce the rDME/propane blends in transportation, the next potential market could be forklifts. Like over-the-road vehicles, these are eligible for California’s low-carbon fuel credits. Beyond that, once the product is on the market and proven, its use could be expanded to other applications.

“The pathway to zero emissions is better with the blended product,” Stivala said. “There is a dramatic impact on air quality when you blend DME with propane, and an even bigger impact if you blend DME with renewable propane.”

“The ultimate panacea for the industry would be commingling the product with propane in the many applications in which propane is utilized,” he concluded. ■

U-HAUL BUYS ITS FIRST MILLION GALLONS OF RENEWABLE PROPANE

STEVE RELYEA

U-Haul has made a big addition to its efforts to promote propane as a clean-burning energy source. The company has purchased its first million gallons of renewable propane. This is now available to customers at U-Haul autogas facilities across Southern California. The company says it plans for this product offering to be ongoing.



"California's goal is net zero emissions, and propane gets us there," John Barnett, U-Haul propane program manager, tells ***BPN***. "Going the renewable route makes a major change to emissions with no change to the engine."

Renewable propane is identical to traditional propane—it's C_3H_8—so it can be used in propane engines and other equipment, he explained. At the same time, its carbon intensity (CI) score is lower. While traditional propane has a CI of 83, the renewable propane U-Haul has purchased from Suburban Propane Partners LP has a CI of 45. This renewable propane is a byproduct of biodiesel, which is made from fats and greases. "It's really clean," Barnett notes.

At each U-Haul store offering renewable propane, all the propane dispensed for use in vehicles and other applications will be renewable. U-Haul will absorb the extra cost of the product, so consumers will pay no additional charge. Signage is being prepared so that consumers will know that the propane they are buying is renewable.

"As a California native, I know the culture of the state is always looking into the future when it comes to being green," Barnett says. "I haven't heard much about renewable propane, though. Why aren't people talking about it like they talk about electricity? Propane is much cleaner than the coal burned to create electricity."

He added that he hopes U-Haul's announcement of its purchase of these million gallons will build that kind of talk about the green benefits of propane. In addition, by encouraging others in the industry to move in the direction of renewable propane, it will encourage more production.

This is one of several measures U-Haul has taken to promote green living, sustainability, and safety.

To encourage fleets to convert to autogas, the company dispenses autogas along with propane for other applications at 1150 locations across the country. "They don't have to invest in infrastructure; they can use ours," Barnett says. It offers fleet pricing on autogas. "Whether you have one vehicle or 100, you can get a negotiated fleet price." U-Haul also sets an example; its own fleet includes 250 area field manager vehicles and an undisclosed number of rental trucks that are fueled by autogas.

To reduce wasted packaging and the other problems of disposable one-pound cylinders, the company offers reusable



John Barnett, U-Haul propane program manager







one-pound cylinders at every store in California and at some stores in Arizona, Colorado, Texas, and Wisconsin. “Forty million disposables end up in landfills every year,” Barnett says. “Propane is a green product in every other respect, yet the industry puts 40 million cylinders in landfills.” He notes that U-Haul’s one-pound cylinders are promoted to consumers as “reusable,” not “refillable”; the company recommends the cylinders be refilled by trained professionals.

To ensure consumers were following safety protocols while fueling their grills last summer, the company offered free qualification checks on all cylinders at all U-Haul stores that sell propane. The inspections were free to consumers, whether or not they bought propane. Barnett notes that a majority of the cylinders in circulation are outside their original manufacturer’s qualification date. “Of course, we inspect cylinders every time we fill them, but consumers need to be educated about rust, dents, and dings. So we advertised that we would check the safety of their cylinder and make sure there were no leaks.”

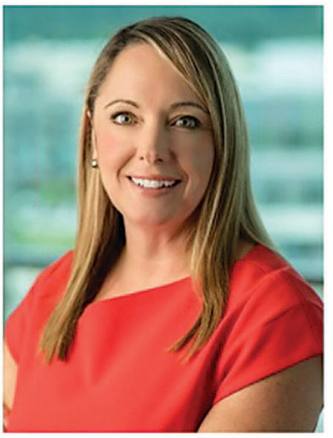


U-Haul promotes sustainable solutions in a number of other ways. These include operating trucks that are lower and have rounded corners to reduce fuel consumption; distributing boxes and other moving materials that are reusable, biodegradable, or made from recycled materials; and, of course, a having a business model that enables consumers to rent a truck when they need it, rather than having to hold on to a truck of their own that may be old and rarely used.

“Adding renewable propane moves forward our renewable efforts,” Barnett concludes. “We plan to buy more and push suppliers to produce more. I encourage other marketers to look at renewable too.” ■



Bob Barry
Chair-Elect



Michelle Bimson Maggi
Vice Chair



Jeffrey Stewart
Treasurer



Steve Kaminski
President & CEO

NPGA TO LAUNCH $435,000 ENVIRONMENTAL OUTREACH CAMPAIGN

STEVE RELYEA

Propane industry advocates will soon launch a campaign to debunk the misperception of propane as anything other than a clean energy solution. During the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) 2020 fall board of directors meeting, NPGA chair Denis Gagne said bans that prohibit propane use present an "existential crisis" to the industry. He added that, in response, NPGA will collaborate with the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) to reach different audiences.

Some initial details were laid out during the meeting, which was held virtually on Sept. 30. NPGA will invest $435,000 in this effort during the first year. Its outreach will be directed at policymakers, while PERC's will be aimed at consumers, marketers, and thought leaders. After the first year, to help fund NPGA's outreach campaign, the association will likely implement a dues increase in 2022. This would be its first dues increase in six years, Gagne said, adding that it would "aid us in the fight of our lifetime."

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

"We can and must meet the challenge with our environmental outreach campaign," added Gagne, who is senior vice president of supply and acquisitions at Eastern Propane & Oil (Rochester, N.H.). "As you can imagine, it is not inexpensive."

During the president's report, NPGA president and CEO Steve Kaminski highlighted several other things the association is doing on the environmental front. Among them: supporting state and regional associations as they demonstrate propane as a part of the clean energy future with facts and data to policymakers; developing an advocacy tool kit for NPGA members; facilitating site visits by members of Congress; working with Congress and standards-making bodies to highlight the myth that electrification is better for the environment than using propane; accepting an invitation to join the World LPG Association's advocacy steering group; and coordinating efforts with allied associations.



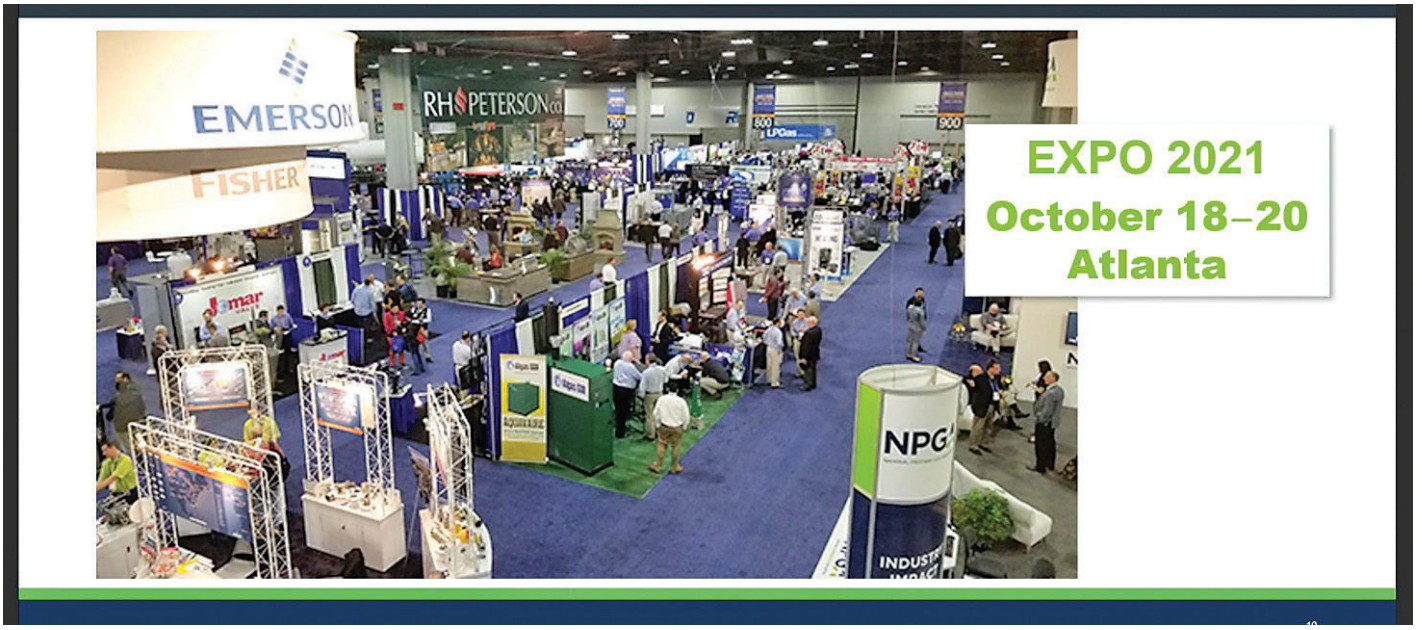
Denis Gagne
Chair

MEETING WITH LIKE-MINDED ASSOCIATIONS

Kaminski added that immediately after the board meeting, he was going to meet with presidents and CEOs of other like-minded associations to discuss these critical issues.

"Over the past several years, we have seen an existential crisis take root in the halls of state houses, county assemblies, and city council chambers," Kaminski said. "Denis pointed out that we intend to expand NPGA's role in tackling many of those head-on to the tune of investing an additional $435,000 next year on that effort."

Speakers at the NPGA board meet-



ing also pointed to some environmental resources that are already available to help marketers talk about the environmental benefits of propane. NPGA's Fight Electrification tool kit is meant to help marketers talk to policymakers. It is available in the Member Dashboard at *npga.org*. PERC's Environment portal is meant to help marketers talk to customers and employees. It can be reached by clicking the "Environment" tab on the home page of *propane.com.*

During the board meeting, other speakers reiterated the importance of the upcoming campaign. "Last night, I downloaded all the material on the NPGA Member Dashboard and the PERC portal," said Mike Hopsicker, CEO of Ray Murray Inc. (Pittsfield, Mass.) and chair of NPGA's governmental affairs committee. "I am excited about this campaign. This is a fight that needs fighting."

IN OTHER NEWS...

In other news from the board meeting and committee meetings held Sept. 28-30:

- The 2021 Southeastern Convention & International Propane Expo is to be held Oct. 18-20, 2021, in Atlanta. Previously scheduled for April, it has been moved to the fall due to the continuing public health concerns and travel restrictions. "The NPGA conventions committee, executive committee, and staff all felt it was a better option than to cross our fingers for April of '21 or move to a virtual platform in April," Kaminski said. He added that the 2021 fall board of directors meeting is to be held along with the Expo, to minimize travel. The 2022 Expo is to be held six months later in Nashville.
- NPGA has launched a new section on its website devoted to helping marketers obtain information on grants through the federal government. For example, this section will include information about grants for replacing diesel school buses with propane school buses. It will complement resources available from PERC; while PERC's materials are for marketers, NPGA's will focus on advocacy and agency outreach, explained Sarah Reboli, deputy counsel, regulatory affairs at NPGA. This "Funding Resources" is in the Member Dashboard at *npga.org*. Born from the need to provide information on funds following the immediate outbreak of COVID-19, the Funding Resources webpage will soon be updated with more for NPGA members.
- The Propane Logistics Analysis Network (PLAN) tool had more than 4600 users and 8600 sessions in its first year. Developed to gather and share information on wait times at terminals to help drivers maximize hours of service, the app was launched in September of 2019 as part of the NPGAction app. Seventy-four percent of the users submit reports on their mobile phone or tablet, reported Eric Sears, manager, state association relations at NPGA. To help boost the use of this crowdsourced app, Sears suggested users promote and share the app with others in the industry; report wait times, even if there is no wait; report supply point closures, whether temporary or permanent; provide or edit terminal information; and provide constructive feedback to NPGA. The PLAN tool is part of the NPGAction app and can be downloaded via the Google Play or Apple App stores; desktop users can visit *https://plan.npga.org*.

A DYNAMIC, VIRTUAL MEETING

This was the second NPGA board meeting to be held virtually. This time, several social events and Business Basics educational sessions were added to the traditional lineup of board and committee meetings. "NPGA was challenged by our officers to make it as dynamic as possible; to try to bring in member companies and employees at all levels to participate, since they wouldn't have to travel; to add bread-and-butter Business Basics for some who might want a flavor without having to invest in full coursework, and to attempt to replicate some aspects of the social interactions with our propane friends who we all miss so much. I hope our team was successful in this endeavor and that you enjoyed the past two days," Kaminski told those attending the virtual meeting. Over the course of three days and 48 meetings, more than 330 participants logged in.

The next NPGA board meeting is to be held Feb. 2, 2021, in Rancho Mirage, Calif. "Let's hope we can meet in person," Gagne said as he closed the fall meeting. ■

MARKETING

Continued from **Page 30**

nology usage, the pandemic presented real benefits to getting caught up fast."

BOOSTING DIGITAL USE

"With the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many ways providers of home services are seeing new habits in customers and many ways technology can help meet the need," Corbett told ***BPN***. "Many people want contactless service and the ability to pay bills online. The companies who can best meet these needs will gain new customers. The social-distancing lifestyle is presenting new opportunities." Corbett's presentation noted that internet usage has spiked during the coronavirus outbreak. "Social media, texting, video chatting via Zoom, Facebook, and Houseparty have become people's connection to the world outside their homes."

Key changes due to the pandemic include a return to price awareness, lost jobs, reduced wages, fuel prices at record lows, and competitors hunting for new accounts. Corbett noted that people are focused on home time more than ever. "Vacations are becoming *stay*cations," he said. "E-commerce spending is up 30% over last year. Sales are up 220% in the furniture category amongst online sellers. The *New York Times* has eliminated their highly influential *Travel* section and replaced it with a new section called *At Home.*"

"Even now that things are trending toward 'normal,' spending time at home will be part of the *new* normal," Corbett said. "During the recovery from the 2008 recession, we saw an increase in expenditures on 'home comfort' as people opted to focus on their homes, updating inefficient equipment and improving their comfort. For most people, spending more time at home means a desire to have your home more comfortable and more efficient."

He noted that this year, in the month of March, Rinnai sold a record number of tankless water heaters as homeowners faced the reality of increased hot water demand while everyone in the family is home. Other observations included a 14% increase in organic traffic searches to oil, propane, and HVAC companies' websites; an 18% increase in visits to their websites generated by paid search campaigns; a 10% increase in total leads; and a 50% increase in Facebook usage.

"We have an opportunity now where customers are looking to pay bills online, enroll in payment programs like budget plans and automatic payments, review social distancing policies, and shop for equipment such as water heaters," Corbett explained. "Prospects are looking to see if they can do better than their current provider and looking for new customer offers."

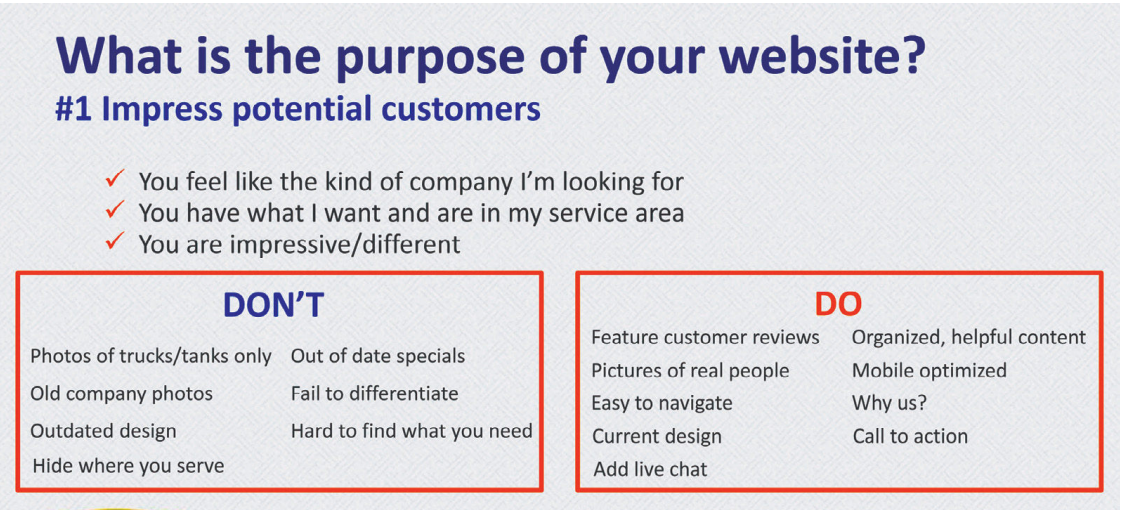
MARKETERS' WEBSITE MISTAKES

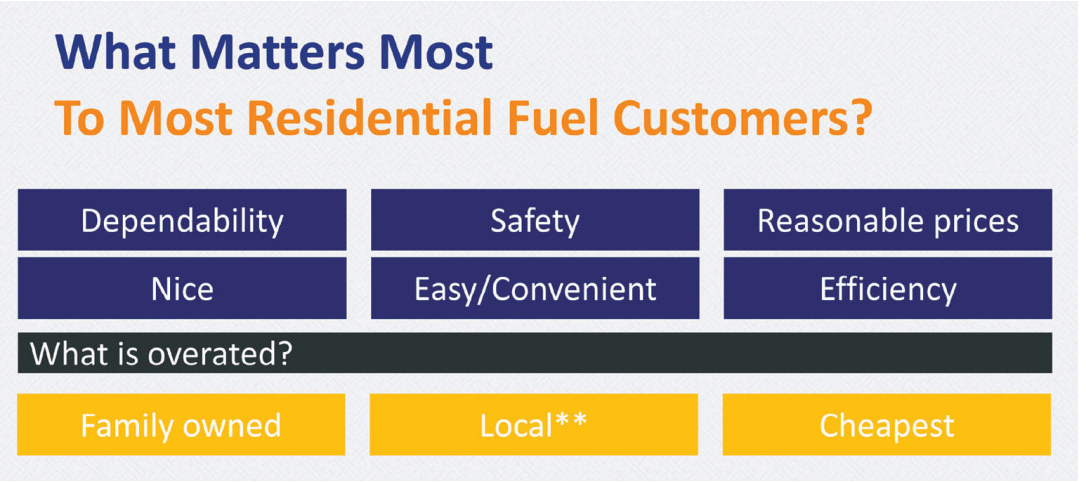
As a carefully designed presence on the internet becomes more and more important, ***BPN*** asked Corbett to identify the biggest mistake he sees in propane websites. "Most overlook the importance of having the website be found in the first place," Corbett said. "If you can't be easily found, it doesn't matter how good the website is. Knowing how search engine optimization and algorithms work is important. It is good to have a dedicated employee or outsource who understands these concepts and how to update properly and utilize key words. Once on the website, it is important to be able to find the key information you are looking for. Prospective customers are looking for an opportunity to become a customer. They don't want to search too hard for the key information they are looking for. If not easily found, they may move on."

Corbett noted that while Yellow Pages used to be the top method for finding a service provider, the internet has changed the game completely. "Some young adults have never used the Yellow Pages. They went straight to learning to use Google searches. Most adults of all ages are now doing internet searches, so companies need to be very savvy about key words and the towns served being prominent on the webpages."

BPN asked Corbett if Facebook is the main social media platform retail energy providers should be using for marketing. "Facebook is the platform that should be used first and foremost," Corbett said. "Most don't have the staff to keep up with much more than Facebook. It is better to have a consistently updated presence on one platform rather than a weak presence on three." He mentioned Instagram and Twitter as the next most popular platforms where an energy marketer may want to be.

"Facebook plus Google equals a lot of search engine optimization. If you are not showing up in searches for your services or for water heaters, etc., you are not going to get optimum attention. You must be found by the categories of services you offer in every town in your service territory."





PURPOSE OF THE WEBSITE

"Impressing potential customers should be the No. 1 purpose of your website," Corbett said. "The prospect should feel you have the kind of company they seek, the prospect should feel you have what they want and are in their service area, and they should feel you are impressive and different." Don'ts include photos of trucks/tanks only, old company photos, outdated design, hiding where you serve, out-of-date specials, failure to differentiate, and making it hard to find what is needed. Do's include featuring customer reviews, pictures of real people, making navigation easy, a current design, addition of live chat, content that is organized and helpful, mobile optimization, an answer to the question "Why us?," and a call to action.

Corbett noted that factors most customers look for include dependability, safety, reasonable prices, niceness, easiness/convenience, and efficiency. Overrated features are family owned, local, and cheapest.

"Can customers interact with the website?" Corbett asked. "Can customers pay on the site? Is there a virtual showroom for hearth products, grills, water heaters, etc.? Are you focused on turning passive website visits into action?" He said that inviting calls, form submits, and chats are key tools for mobilizing new customers.

Another key point Corbett made was the importance of site performance in a mobile environment. He pointed out that websites used to be designed first and foremost for desktop and laptop computer screens. "Later it was stressed that websites should also be 'mobile-friendly,' meaning the site should be adjustable to a mobile device," Corbett explained. "Now, most web searches are being done from a mobile device and the advice is 'mobile-first,' meaning sites should be designed first and foremost for the mobile screen and adjustable to the desktop or laptop screen. Ninety percent of people will move on from your site if the mobile experience is bad; 88% of people won't come back after a bad experience." ■

GAGNE

Continued from **Page 33**

good to know what companies are doing in all segments of the country." He also feels blessed to have Steve Kaminski, the new NPGA president and CEO, as well as the entire NPGA staff.

"Many important issues that will shape the future of the industry are being worked on right now. The challenges of the electrify everything movement and decarbonization are top priorities right now," Gagne said. "Propane has a place in a low-carbon society. We are working with our leadership and the leaders of PERC to create messages." Gagne said that NPGA, the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), and the state propane associations are like a three-legged stool that must stand together to face the challenges ahead. He also noted the sale of the Certified Employee Training Program (CETP) to PERC has been finalized after several years of discussion and planning. "Our goal all along was to train people in the most cost-effective way with good record-keeping, documentation, and certification."

He has worked closely with NPGA officers and staff to keep priorities moving along despite the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cancelling a major expo and bringing the staff together to quickly mobilize the industry to face COVID-19 was a major undertaking. Providing all the information and tools the industry needed while staff sheltered at home was a challenge. The "new normal" of COVID-19 has created the need for new approaches to communication. "Zoom allows us to still see each other," Gagne said. "It's better than just a conference call and it's definitely better than just emailing each other back and forth constantly. Some of the forced changes actually will make us a better, more effective organization." Gagne feels doing shorter meetings, but more often, has helped several processes to move faster and he said frequent Zoom meetings of the officers will continue even when in-person meetings resume.

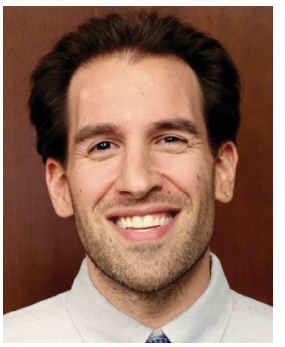
With years of industry service on NPGA's Executive Committee, the Propane Supply and Logistics Committee, the Technology Standards & Safety Committee, and the Propane Gas Association of New England, he has touched many issues impacting the industry. Few issues Gagne has had to work on during his career match the challenges of COVID-19 and the electrify everything movement. "It's an important time in our industry and we're facing these challenges head-on," he said. "When my role as chairman ends, I really want to feel we've moved the industry ahead." ■



JOE ROSENGRANT
Cetane Associates LLC



RUSS RIDINGS
Gas Equipment Co. Inc.



DAVID ROBERTS
InSite Platform Partners

Joe Rosengrant has joined the **Cetane Associates LLC** (Kent, Conn.) financial advisory team as a director of business development. He has more than 30 years of experience with valuation and transactions in the propane and delivered fuels industries. Most recently, Rosengrant served in business development roles at ThompsonGas, Superior Plus Corp., and NGL Energy Partners. Earlier in his career, he held various operational roles at Suburban Propane, the Piedmont Propane division of Piedmont Natural Gas, and Heritage Propane. During his career, Rosengrant has been an avid supporter of various industry trade associations.

The **Pennsylvania Propane Gas Association** (PAPGA) has elected **Beth Donovan** of Shipley Energy (York) as its president. She and other newly elected executive committee members will serve a two-year term. Executive committee members include president-elect **Hugh Rich III**, Richgas Inc. (Kane); vice president, **Chris Wolfe**, Ray Murray Inc. (Bensalem); treasurer, **Mark Delehanty**, Independence Propane (Green Lane); and secretary, **Mike George**, E.F.Laudenslager Inc. (Orefield). Donovan succeeds **Harold Sweet** of Superior Plus Propane (Dalton), who had been president since 2018 and will continue to serve on the executive committee as immediate past president.

Russ Ridings, vice-president of **Gas Equipment Co. Inc.** (Dallas), has retired after 40 years with the com-





pany. He started with GEC in 1980 as inside sales in the Dallas office. Over the years, his role within the company changed several times as he helped the LaDue family grow the business. Ridings has influenced every aspect of the company from sales to marketing to purchasing to operations. He has also been active in the propane industry, participating in various organizations including the National Propane Gas Association.

InSite Platform Partners (St. Charles, Mo.) has named **David Roberts** as its new product development manager. He has more than 15 years of experience in product innovation, licensing, and sales. In his new role, Roberts will develop and refine products for enterprise clients, working with business and technical stakeholders to architect solutions to help them meet their business objectives. Roberts will play a key role in improving the reliability and usability for all InSite products. Prior to joining InSite Platform Partners, Roberts served as president & founder of 74 Global, a product development and licensing firm. Most recently, He served as partner-broker with business brokerage house Premier Business Brokers.

The **Wisconsin Propane Gas Association** (WPGA) board of directors announced election results for its new board at the annual WPGA membership meeting. The 2020-2021 slate of officers was also approved at the organizational meeting. Serving as president is **Brian Poehls**, L & S Truck Center (Greenville); vice president, **Bryon Walters**, Walters Gas Service (Beaver Dam); and treasurer, **Dianne Dallmann**, Allied Cooperative (Adams). Committee chairs include: **Brian Poehls**, L & S Truck Center, Membership; **Dianne Dallmann**, Allied Cooperative, Convention; and **Chris Tews**, Dale Gas & Oil (Dale), Government Affairs.

Two district director positions were up for election this year. Propane marketer members elected to serve a 3-year term in these positions include: **Steve Guise** (Incumbent), Ultra Energy (River Falls); and **Gary France** (Incumbent), France Propane Service.

The **Arkansas Propane Gas Association** has elected its officers for the 2020-2021 term. Serving as president is **Drew Craft** of Craft Propane (Jonesboro); and **Tommy Vanaman** of AmeriGas Propane (North Little Rock), treasurer.

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Continued from **Page 16**

awarded half of the verdict to Jones' grandchild. Jones' wife was awarded $918,947. The rest of the verdict was awarded to Jones' four children. He did not claim any damages and was not a party to the lawsuit. Pain and suffering and other non-economic damages composed the majority of each plaintiff's award.

The jury also allocated fault, finding that Carl Jones Sr. and CenterPoint were equally at fault for the explosion. As a result, the court entered a judgment holding CenterPoint responsible for 50% of the total award. The total award with interest equaled $22.1 million. Under the judgment, CenterPoint is therefore responsible to the plaintiffs for approximately $11 million.

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

INDUSTRY CALENDAR

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

2020

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

Nov. 10—PERC Council Meeting, virtual meeting; (202) 452-8975; *propane.com/newsroom/events/perc-council-meeting-virtual-2/*

Nov. 16-18—Air-Conditioning, Heating & Refrigeration Institute Leadership Forum, Virtual. (703) 524-8800; *ahrinet.org/News-Events/Meetings-and-Events*

2021

Feb. 4-5—2021 PACEshow, Kansas City Convention Center, Kansas City, Mo. *info@paceshow.com; paceshow.com*

Feb. 9-11—NAHB International Builders' Show, Virtual.
Register at *buildersshow.com*

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

Feb. 18-24—NRECA PowerXchange Annual Meeting, Virtual. (703) 907-5500. *cooperative.com/conferences-education/meetings/annual-meeting*

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/*

March 7-9—National Propane Gas Association Spring TS&S Committee Meeting, The Fontaine, Kansas City, Mo. (202) 466-7200; *npga.org/organization/npga-events/*

June 8-10—Global Energy Show 2021, Stampede Park, Calgary, Alta. (403) 444-6523; *globalenergyshow.com*

June 23-26—HPBExpo 2021; Kentucky Exposition Center, Louisville, Ky. (703) 522-0086 ext 113; *hpbexpo.com*

Aug. 23-26—North Central Propane Industry Convention and Trade Show, La Crosse Center, La Crosse, Wis. Deb Grooms, (515) 564-1260; *npga.org/event/north-central-convention/*

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(2) In-County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541. *(Include direct written request from recipient, telemarketing, and Internet requests from recipient, paid subscriptions including nominal rate subscriptions, employer requests, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies.)*	—	—
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f. Total Distribution *(Sum of 15c and e)*	11,548	11,077
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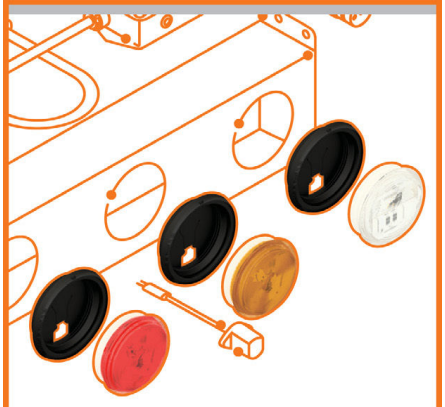
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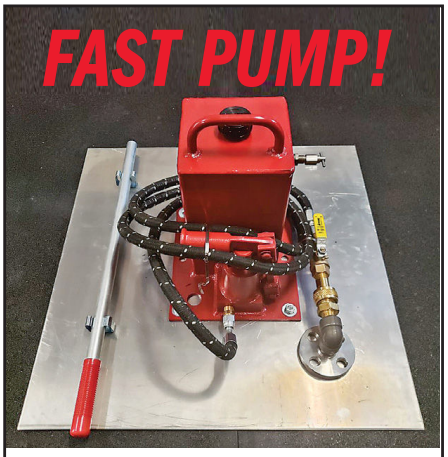




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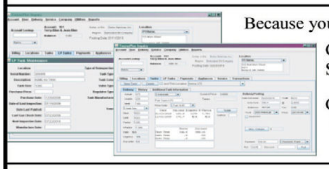
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PERC

Continued from **Page 34**

[Steve Kaminski, president and CEO of NPGA], as well as their staffs meet weekly to discuss the future of propane and where NPGA and PERC can collaborate to make our industry stronger," Dixon said. "Denis [Denis Gagne, chairman of NPGA] and I have a joint executive officer call monthly and we have a joint officer call often to discuss pressing industry issues. The current Environmental Task Force includes two officers from PERC and two officers from NPGA. The task force will create a plan that will benefit our industry as we come up with universal and unified messaging around the environmental benefits of propane and how these benefits compare to other types of fuels."

Dixon encourages propane industry members to visit the *propane.com* website and see the changes that have been made to the website. "Industry members should be aware of all the resources available to their customers, whether it be residential, commercial, agriculture, autogas, environmental messaging, etc. PERC, NPGA, and the state associations are working together better than ever. We have headwinds in front of us, but we are a diligent industry. Never underestimate what our industry can do when we work together." ■

CSRs

Continued from **Page 29**

and before they take customer calls unsupervised."

"Small independents are not as likely to have a formal, documented process, but the majors most definitely do," Laney said. "I think that's beginning to change as well as training resources become more accessible and more task-based and as more authorities having jurisdiction require it."

Kelsey Bright, director of customer service at ThompsonGas, agrees that training customer service representatives in all aspects of safety is critical. "We have a variety of regular training classes for our CSRs on handling emergency calls. It is so important that we not become complacent," Bright told ***BPN***. "It has been important that customers have had a way to stay in touch with us on all concerns during the pandemic."

"One of the most difficult things to get across is why we have and use a scripted safety message on priority calls," Laney explained. "Some of the best CSRs are friendly and personable. They know their customers and take care of them, so a scripted message seems unnatural and robotic. That's why it's essential to practice these calls and reinforce the importance of providing the entire safety message." ■

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PASSION FOR TRUCKS PROPELLED SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN TRANSPORTATION

KAREN MASSMAN VanASDALE

Angela Branchi's passion for trucks has guided her from early days at Cal Gas Transportation to her current role as senior vice president of the NGL division at Grammer Logistics. From her home base in Wilmington, N.C., Branchi helps navigate the transportation company's operations and growth strategy after last year's acquisition of her previous company, Sterling Transport Co.

At 22, she took a job as a transportation clerk in Cheyenne, Wyo., at Cal Gas Transportation, which later became AmeriGas. "I never had any intentions of getting into the trucking industry, but I answered an ad and evidently found my passion," she said.

For the next 20 years, Branchi navigated her way through various roles at AmeriGas, eventually managing the Northeast after spending years managing Western truck operations. Along the way, she moved to Houston and met her husband, Christian, who also worked for AmeriGas. In 2005, the couple moved to North Carolina where Branchi spent seven years at Werner Transportation Services before they sold to Crestwood, then moved on to Sterling Transport where she spent another seven years. In both roles, she was instrumental in helping grow the companies before they were sold.

"I've done everything that you can imagine, whether clerk, office manager, payroll, supply rep, rail, pipeline, but my true passion was in trucks," she explained. "I like the ability of talking to drivers. I've had drivers who I've known for 30-plus years who I still keep in contact with. It's like a family. Drivers know my kids' names. My kids know my drivers' names.

"In my current role, I don't have as much time to spend with the drivers as I have had in years past, but I always try to make time for them when they call," she said. "Drivers are the heart and soul of our industry and put in countless hours on the road. They sacrifice a lot of time away from their families. We take great pride in the job they do every day."



In the early days of her career, most of the business was based around retail propane, which came with its seasonal challenges, Branchi said. Her roles evolved once the U.S. shale revolution opened up giving the industry a much-needed boost to help provide a more year-round business; butane blending followed a few years later. With this product mix, it's allowed for a more consistent flow of work.

At Grammer Logistics, Branchi takes "a 10,000-foot view" to strategically focus on the equipment and operations side of the business. The company provides bulk hazardous material transportation services with more than 20 facilities strategically located near major chemical production hubs across the country. More than 500 drivers and owner-operators support more than 2000 delivery points serving 500-plus customers.

One of her primary responsibilities involves managing all of the NGL transportation needs. "Anything that goes in an MC 331 in the NGL side, which is about 250 units, nationwide," she said.

The past year and a half have brought many challenges integrating the two companies, plus the challenges of managing COVID-19, but Branchi remains focused developing and growing Grammer Logistics' workforce. She takes great pride in mentoring her staff as she was mentored in her early days.

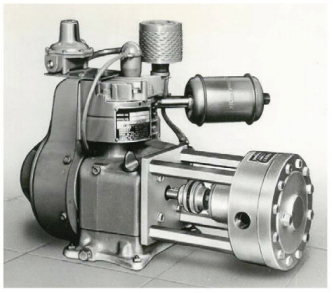
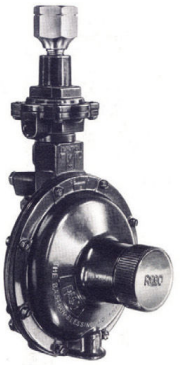
Finding a work/life balance isn't easy, Branchi noted, but having Christian in the same industry helps. "It's nice to have a husband who understands the level of time that's involved. But I do have to say, he's somewhat of a workaholic, as well."

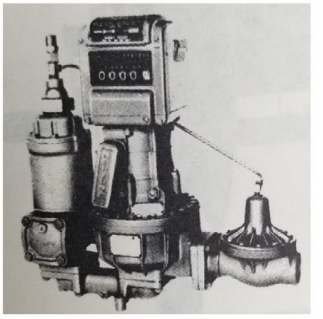
The couple enjoys spending time with their son and daughter who live together in Charlotte, but come home regularly to visit, and with other family members who are nearby. "We always enjoy sitting around the table enjoying good memories and conversation," Branchi said.

They also spend a lot of time outdoors including boating and fishing. "We both enjoy exercising—which is a necessity—if not, the stress would get to us." ■

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