BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

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DECEMBER | 2020



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ADIEU, 2020

NATALIE PEAL

Farewell, au revoir, ciao, auf Wiedersehen, adios, sayonara, so long, cheerio, and goodbye. No matter how you say it, I think most everyone will be happy to have the final chapter of 2020 written, and is hopeful for what 2021 will bring.

As an industry, I believe we have been far more fortunate than most. Because propane has been deemed an essential industry, there have been fewer job losses, fewer people experiencing economic upheaval, and possibly less emotional stress overall, other than trying to work from home and at the same time encompass the role of surrogate teacher.

In our position as an essential industry, we've been more at the forefront and able to show consumers just how valuable and dependable our fuel is. Over the past nine months, propane has demonstrated its value time and again. As an example, in rural areas of the U.S., propane-fueled school buses have been parked in areas without adequate Wi-Fi capability so that students can utilize the bus's Wi-Fi to be able to connect their computers to the school's learning platform. This way they are able to keep up with their studies and not fall behind their classmates.

Most consumers are aware of propane-fueled grills, patio heaters, and fire pits. This past year, these residential additions have provided the creature comforts that can calm an anxious mind. They have extended the boundaries of the home so that as the stay-at-home mandates were put in place, there was an extra space outside to relax, eat, and not be as confined as without these comforts.

In addition, restaurants have increased outdoor dining space and extended their patio service by using patio heaters and fire pits well past the usual summer season. The investments being made in the outdoor appliances, along with the necessary propane cylinders, should make this a trend that will play out well beyond the COVID-19 restrictions.

The propane industry itself has stepped up to bring aid and comfort to those facing hardships this past year. On all points of the map it is easy to find propane companies who have helped their communities by holding food drives, providing meals for health care and other essential staff, making sure that areas for COVID-19 testing as well as the temporary structures for housing patients during the pandemic are equipped with enough propane cylinders to keep the heaters working. These are just a few examples of how propane people worked together to benefit their communities during this difficult year.

Looking forward, 2021 will hopefully bring less stress and strife. A new year is always full of promises, and with any luck, this one should be for the better. To our propane family, I wish you good health and all the best in 2021. From all of us at ***BPN***, have a Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and a wonderful New Year.

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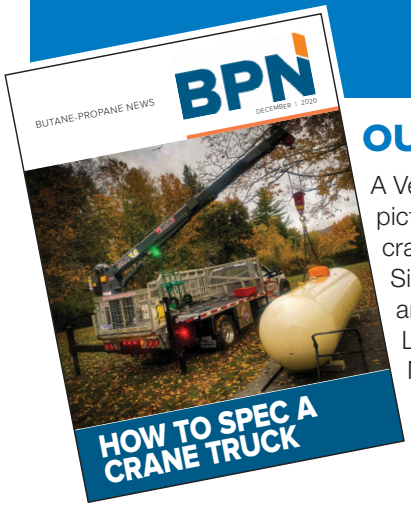

OUR COVER

A Venturo HT45KX crane is pictured here on a Linebacker crane service truck built by Signature Truck Systems, LLC and owned and operated by Lipton Energy in Western Massachusetts. Photo courtesy Lipton Energy (Pittsfield, Mass.)

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Keeping up with customer demand during home heating season is important, and so is keeping your team and your customers healthy and safe during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. To help, the Propane Education & Research Council has compiled the most up-to-date safety resources for you to review with your employees. You'll find everything from guidelines on how to safely enter a customer's home, to managing safer employee-employee interactions.

Now's not the time to get complacent: visit **Propane.com/COVID-Safety** for COVID-19 safety tips and reminders.

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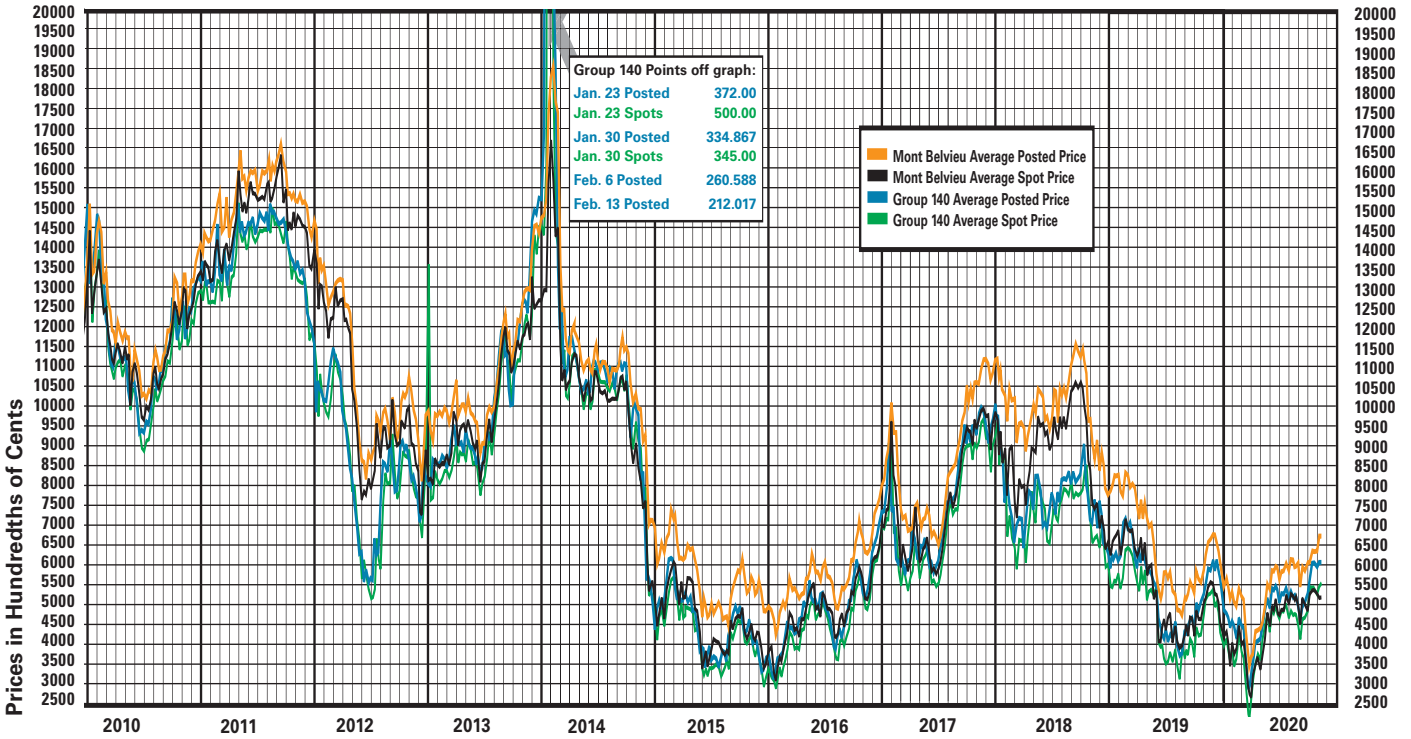


MONT BELVIEU & GROUP 140 AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES

MID-WEEK AVERAGE POSTED/ SPOT PROPANE PRICES

(Cents per Gallon)

Date	Mont Belvieu		Group 140	
	POSTED	SPOT	POSTED	SPOT
10-15-20	63.507	53.00-53.50	60.117	53.50-54.50
10-22-20	63.257	53.25-53.625	60.267	54.00-54.50
10-29-20	63.507	52.125-52.875	59.817	52.125-52.50
11-5-20	67.257	56.00-56.75	60.617	54.00-54.75
11-12-20	67.257	56.375-56.875	60.517	54.875-55.25

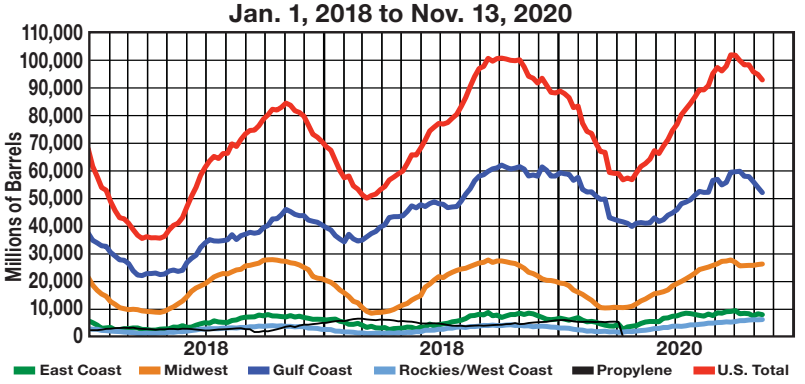
U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Oct. 16, 2020 to Nov. 13, 2020 and One Year Ago

	10/16/20	10/23/20	10/30/20	11/6/20	11/13/20	11/15/19
East Coast	8,539	8,412	7,584	8,396	8,080	8,610
Midwest	25,790	25,881	25,869	26,174	26,354	23,374
Gulf Coast	58,079	57,970	56,145	54,112	52,168	53,132
Rockies/West	5,917	6,128	6,230	6,207	6,285	4,044
U.S. Total	98,325	98,391	95,828	94,889	92,887	89,160

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Jan. 1, 2018 to Nov. 13, 2020



U.S. RESIDENTIAL PROPANE PRICES

(Mid-Month, Cents per Gallon)

Region	Date		
	11-20	10-20	11-19
East Coast (PADD I)	257.5	251.6	254.7
Midwest (PADD II)	145.7	139.8	162.4
Average U.S.	185.5	179.0	197.0

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

CANADIAN INVENTORIES

(Nov. 1, 2020)

Thousand Cubic Meters

PROPANE

Region	11-20	10-20	Change	11-19
Propane—East	931.1	887.0	+5.0%	456.2
Propane–West	1480.3	1489.4	–0.6%	759.7
Total Propane	**2411.4**	**2376.4**	**+1.5%**	**1215.9**

BUTANE

Butane—East	391.6	465.0	–15.8%	266.5
Butane—West	1035.6	949.8	+9.0%	376.8
Total Butane	**1427.3**	**1414.9**	**+0.9%**	**643.3**

Source: National Energy Board

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QUALITY STEEL CORP. PARENT COMPANY ACQUIRES ASSETS OF BUCKEYE FABRICATING CO.

LT Corp. (Cleveland, Miss.), the parent company of Quality Steel Corp. and LP Cylinder Service Inc., announced Oct. 28 the acquisition of substantially all of the assets of Buckeye Fabricating Co.

Buckeye Fabricating (Springfield, Ohio), founded in 1963, fabricates custom-designed welded steel ASME pressure vessels and non-code tanks. The company serves a variety of end users in multiple industries and has established itself as one of the prominent producers of custom fabricated pressure vessels and process tanks in the U.S.

Jim Tims, chairman of the board of LT Corp., said, "The prospect of developing this new familial relationship and adding to the product diversity of our companies has us very excited. We look forward to developing longstanding relations with the customer base and associates of Buckeye Fabricating."

Sean Wessel, president & CEO of Quality Steel, stated, "The addition of Buckeye to LT Corp.'s family of companies helps us to further our corporate objectives for growth and diversification. We're very excited to…build upon the previous success of Buckeye's custom vessel business."

LT Corp.'s vice president of strategy & corporate development, Dean Francis, added, "Buckeye's focus on providing an excellent customer experience and its dedication to exceeding customers' expectations align perfectly with the core values of LT Corp. and its affiliates."

Richard Macaulay, owner & CEO of Buckeye Fabricating, concluded, "It's exciting to see the possibilities of growth with the synergies of adding together each organization's expertise and core competencies. These combined resources will make a strong business corporation with depth and capacity to be a dominant leader in the pressure vessels industry. I am proud that the legacy of Buckeye Fabricating will continue to move forward with significance and longevity."

DEAD RIVER ACQUIRES 10TH COMPANY IN 3 YEARS

Cetane Associates LLC (Kent, Conn.) recently announced completion of the acquisition of the heating oil, propane, and service business of Fortier & Son Inc. (Somersworth, N.H.) by Dead River Co. (South Portland, Maine) on Oct. 27. Details of the transaction were not revealed.

Founded in 1950 by Robert W. Fortier, Fortier & Son Inc. sells and delivers propane and heating oil to residential customers from its New Hampshire facility, which includes a 78,000-gal. propane bulk plant. Its service department performs heating and cooling equipment installation and repair services. Bob Fortier, the son of the founder Robert W. Fortier, joined the business in 1976, and became the owner in 2004, upon Robert's retirement. He viewed propane as the next step in the company's expansion, and today the company continues as a full-service heating fuel dealer in a highly focused delivery area.

"For 70 years, ours has been a locally owned and operated business, with deep ties to our community," added Bob Fortier. "Knowing that Dead River is also a family-owned company, known for its high quality of service and for giving back to the communities it serves, puts my mind at ease. I know our customers are in good hands."

"Fortier & Son has earned the trust of their customers for nearly 70 years, and so we're honored that Bob Fortier put his trust in Dead River to carry on that high level of service," said Dead River president and CEO, Deanna Sherman. "

With acquisitions being part of Dead River Co.'s long-term growth strategy, Fortier & Son is the 10th company to join the Dead River family through acquisition over the last three years.

PERC'S NEW AUTOGAS OFFERING

Most members of the propane industry are aware of the benefits that propane autogas delivers, such as cost savings, operational advantages, and lower emissions. These benefits have been presented recently through PERC's Let's Talk webinar series, Autogas Refuel newsletter, and resources on *propane.com*. Another resource is now available to help industry members decide to switch to their propane fleets to autogas. Proven Power for Your Bottom Line: Autogas Adoption is a new eLearning piece on PERC's Learning Center.

This course offers case studies from early autogas adopters, tools to calculate savings, industry fleet information, answers to common misconceptions, and many other resources to save and use while planning the switch.

The first 25 propane marketers to complete the course and survey will receive a Propane Can Do That gaiter.

To access the course, visit The Learning Center at *https://training.propane.com/?utm_campaign=The%20Learning%20Center%20&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=99985122&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-_*

MANCHESTER TANK TO INCREASE PRICES ON SOME STEEL PRODUCTS

Manchester Tank (Franklin, Tenn.) Nov. 13 announced price increases of up to 8% on all of its major coil steel-based product families, including DOT steel propane cylinders, steel forklift cylinders, and air receiver vessels. Changes are effective with all new orders shipping on or after Dec. 15, or as contracts allow.

"Over the past several months Manchester Tank has experienced significant cost increases in cylinders and tanks containing hot rolled coil steel and brass components. We

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have also experienced increases in operating expenses associated with servicing our customers at a high level during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Brendan Dillmann, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Manchester Tank. "We have worked hard to absorb as many of these increases as possible, but we have reached a point where we must adjust prices. We will continue to monitor the markets closely and adjust prices as needed as we get clarity into the cost and availability of raw materials."

F.W. WEBB NEW CAVAGNA DISTRIBUTOR IN NORTH AMERICA

The Cavagna Group (Somerset, N.J.) has added F.W. Webb Co. (Bedford Mass.) as its newest distributor in North America. F.W. Webb Co. is a family-owned and -operated distributor covering 16 disciplines including propane, natural gas, heating, plumbing, HVAC, and PVF (pipe, valves, and fittings). It has more than 85 locations throughout nine states in the Northeast.

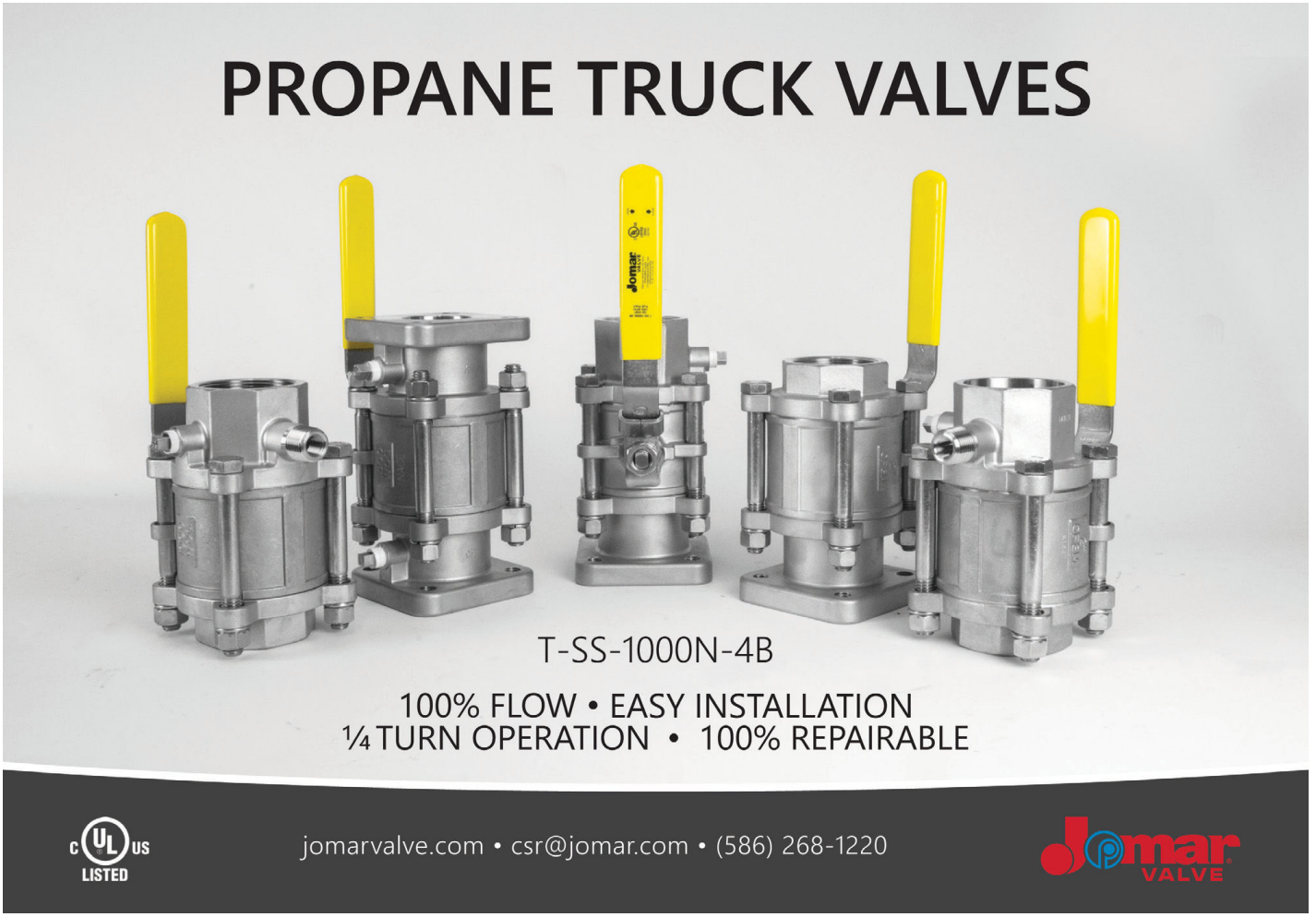
Also family-owned and –operated, the Cavagna Group has 11 manufacturing plants in northern Italy, as well as seven manufacturing plants around the globe. It manufactures regulators and valves for the propane, natural gas, and compressed gas industries; propane and natural gas metering products; propane-powered combustion engines; and other products for emerging markets.

CHESAPEAKE UTILITIES SUBSIDIARY BUYS WESTERN NATURAL GAS

Chesapeake Utilities Corp. (Dover, Del.) has confirmed that its propane subsidiary, Sharp Energy, has acquired Western Natural Gas Co. (Jacksonville, Fla.). The parties closed on this transaction on Oct. 26, and terms of the deal were not disclosed.

"This is an important acquisition for our company as it enables Sharp Energy to immediately expand the availability of its propane operations into Florida and build upon our existing propane footprint," said Jeff Householder, president and CEO of Chesapeake Utilities Corp. "Sharp Energy continues to expand and generate strong performance for our company. They are an industry leader, providing community gas systems, wholesale capabilities, and propane autogas to customers throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. Acquiring Western Natural Gas will assist us in meeting customer demand and expanding our propane distribution foundation in Florida."

Western Natural Gas has been providing propane service to the First Coast of Florida for more than 80 years. It provides propane service to approximately 4000 residential and com-



mercial customers and sells approximately 1 million gallons of propane throughout four counties in northeast Florida.

FMCSA REMINDER FOR DRUG AND ALCOHOL CLEARINGHOUSE

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) recently issued a reminder for employers of commercial drivers to conduct the annual queries in the Commercial Driver's License Drug & Alcohol Clearinghouse. As of Jan. 6, 2020, FMSCA requires employers of commercial driver license (CDL) employees to submit and review information about alcohol and drug violations. FMCSA regulations require that employers conduct a query once every 12 months for current CDL employees, and conduct a query before hiring a prospective driver. Unlike other regulatory requirements, FMCSA has not suspended or otherwise waived the Clearinghouse requirements due to COVID-19.

Employers can register here *https://clearinghouse.fmcsa.dot.gov/register?utm_source=FMCSA&utm_medium=SMS-Update&utm_campaign=register* for the Clearinghouse, and download a Queries and Consent Requests Factsheet from *https://clearinghouse.fmcsa.dot.gov/Resource/Index/Query-Consent-Factsheet* by FMCSA. FMCSA compiled over 50 questions-and-answers to familiarize employers and drivers on the Clearinghouse. The FAQ page is available by going to *https://clearinghouse.fmcsa.dot.gov/FAQ*. More information about the Clearinghouse, including resources for employers as well as drivers, is available on FMCSA's website *https://clearinghouse.fmcsa.dot.gov/FAQ*.

F.M. POPOVICH & SONS INC. JOINS PARACO GAS

Paraco Gas (Rye, N.Y.) completed the acquisition of F.M. Popovich & Sons Inc. (Ashland, Maine) on Oct. 14, and marked the retirement of former owners, Fred and Hildegard Popovich. The Popovich family business, founded by Fred and Wilma Popovich in 1946, grew to serve approximately 850 propane customers. Paraco is also a family-owned and -operated business, and has been servicing Worcester County, Mass. since 2007.

"Paraco has been serving Worcester County with propane product for over a decade," said Fred Popovich, president at F.M. Popovich & Sons Inc. "They already know our customers' needs and our supply demands very well, so this will be an easy and seamless transition."

"Our belief that 'every customer is important' is the cornerstone of our company and we are proud of the level of service that our customers have come to expect and trust for the past 50 years," said Christina Armentano, executive vice president and third-generation family member, at Paraco Gas.



"This opportunity with F.M. Popovich & Sons Inc. combines two strong brands in Worcester County; it demonstrates our commitment to continued growth into New England, and it is a perfect fit with our community-focused family business."

REGO EXPANDS DISTRIBUTION NETWORK IN NORTHEASTERN U.S.

RegO (Elon, N.C.), a provider of advanced valves and controls for liquid and gas in LPG, LNG, cryogenic, and industrial gas industries, has expanded its network of wholesale distributors in the Northeastern U.S. RegO's complete product portfolio of LPG regulators, valves, and tank fittings is now available from distributors Tarantin Industries, R.E. Michel Co., and The Granite Group, with a combined total of more than 100 stocking locations throughout New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

"RegO's expanded distribution network in the Northeast ensures that propane dealers in the region will have access to the full product line of RegO regulators, valves, and other tank brass," said Bob Paul, RegO vice-president of sales.

U.S. ENERGY SECURITY ACHIEVED ITS BEST LEVEL IN 2019

In 2019, the United States was the most energy secure it has been since 1970, according to data in the 2020 edition of the annual *Index of U.S. Energy Security Risk* published by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Energy Institute.

The publication, which covers 1970 to 2019 and includes a forecast out to 2040, measures energy security based on 37 different metrics across a broad range of geopolitical, economic, reliability, and environmental risk factors, with higher scores indicating increased risk. In the eight years since the U.S. risk score peaked at 100.9 in 2011, meaning poor energy security, it has plunged 30.7 points (30%) to 70.1 in 2019, an unprecedented rate of progress.

The tremendous increase in domestic energy production from U.S. shale resources, which have been driven by the use of advanced hydraulic fracturing, horizontal drilling, and seismic imaging technologies, are the primary cause of the dramatically-improved security posture, especially in areas related to imports, prices, and the environment. Greater efficiency also played a role.

Looking to the future, forecasts before the COVID-19 pandemic indicate consistently low energy security risks out to 2040.

"This year's Index shows that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. energy security was in the best position it's been during the last 50 years," said Marty Durbin, president of the U.S. Chamber's Global Energy Institute. "Since 2011, we've gone from importing nearly a fifth of our energy supply to producing slightly more energy than we consume overall, all while keeping prices low and emissions in check.

"This progress wouldn't have been possible without the innovative technologies, notably hydraulic fracturing, that continue to revolutionize domestic energy production. The response to COVID-19 will present enormous challenges in the coming years, but we expect the U.S. energy sector to remain strong and resilient."

To read the full report, and learn more about the methodology used to develop this Index, visit *https://www.globalenergyinstitute.org/energy-security-risk-index*.

OPEC MEMBERS' NET OIL EXPORT REVENUE EXPECTED TO FALL

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) forecasts that members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will earn about $323 billion in net oil export revenues in 2020. If realized, this forecast revenue would be the lowest in 18 years. Lower crude oil prices combined with a decrease in export volumes are driving this expected decrease in export revenues.

Crude oil prices have fallen as a result of lower global demand for petroleum products caused by responses to COVID-19. Export volumes have also declined under OPEC agreements limiting crude oil output that were made in response to low crude oil prices and record-high production disruptions in Libya, Iran, and, to a lesser extent, Venezuela.

OPEC earned an estimated $595 billion in net oil export revenues in 2019, less than half of the estimated record high of $1.2 trillion earned in 2012. Continued declines in revenue in 2020 could be detrimental to member countries' fiscal budgets, which rely heavily on revenues from oil sales to import goods, fund social programs, and support public services. EIA foresees a decline in net oil export revenue for OPEC in 2020 because of continued voluntary curtailments and low crude oil prices.

The benchmark Brent crude oil spot price fell from an annual average of $71/bbl in 2018 to $64/bbl in 2019. EIA expects Brent to average $41/bbl in 2020, based on forecasts in EIA's October 2020 *Short-Term Energy Outlook* (*STEO*). OPEC petroleum production averaged 36.6 MMbbld in 2018 and fell to 34.5 MMbbld in 2019; EIA expects OPEC production to decline an additional 3.9 MMbbld to average 30.7 MMbbld in 2020.

EIA based its OPEC revenues estimate on forecast petroleum liquids production, including crude oil, condensate, and natural gas plant liquids, and forecast values of OPEC petroleum consumption and crude oil prices. EIA recently published a more detailed discussion of OPEC revenue in *This Week in Petroleum*.

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OREGON COURT UPHOLDS CONVICTION IN PROPANE ARSON CASE

DAVID R. SCHLEE

Occasionally, a propane leak is *intentionally* (and criminally) initiated in order to cause an explosion. Motives for this do vary, but often the recovery of insurance money is the reason. One such situation came to light recently when the Court of Appeals of Oregon upheld the conviction of a man whose house was destroyed in a propane explosion. The case is *State v. McNall.*

SUSPICIONS

On April 9, 2016, the home that Michael McNall was renting from his stepmother was destroyed in a propane explosion. Authorities investigating the incident became suspicious when they learned that two months before the explosion, McNall had taken out a renter's insurance policy on the property, and that he was in financial difficulty.

Investigators pinpointed the garage as the epicenter of the explosion, and they identified a ball valve with an uncapped outlet as the source of the gas. They determined that it would have taken about 24 minutes to fill the garage with enough propane to be capable of ignition. On the day of the explosion, McNall left the home about 22 minutes before the explosion. He was the last person in the home before the explosion.

Based on this evidence, McNall was charged with first degree arson and first degree attempted aggravated theft (the alleged theft being the insurance money on his stepmother's house). Before trial, McNall filed a motion for a judgment of acquittal, arguing that the state had failed to provide sufficient evidence that he intentionally caused the explosion. The trial court denied the motion and McNall was convicted of both offenses. He appealed.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

The Court of Appeals held that even though the evidence was circumstantial, there was enough of it to support a conviction. It noted the testimony of fire investigators that they identified propane as the most likely "explosive" based on the condition of physical evidence at the scene and the absence of other explosives on the property. It added that "investigators were able to pinpoint the garage gas line as the origin of the explosion based on the damage the blast wave caused to several nearby objects and a ball valve found in the wreckage of the garage." It then pointed to examination of the ball valve.

> *"[Investigators] determined that it would have taken about 24 minutes to fill the garage with enough propane to be capable of ignition. On the day of the explosion, McNall left the home about 22 minutes before the explosion. He was the last person in the home before the explosion."*

The Court first noted that investigators found the ball valve in the open position. This, it concluded, could not have happened without human intervention. The explosion could not have caused this. In addition, it said, there was no cap on the outlet of the valve. Applicable codes required this, and so a cap should have been there. And the investigators concluded that a cap could not have been torn off by the explosion. The investigators testified that "it must have been removed by someone manually."

PAINT DRYER

McNall countered at trial with testimony that "the garage line was uncapped because he had used it to run a paint dryer for use on his car." The Court stated that while the jury was free to accept this explanation, it was also free to reject it, which it obviously did in finding McNall guilty.

The Court ruled that "it was unlikely that the explosion was caused accidentally by a leak as the pipe had not been visibly punctured." It added:

> "Although the state's expert acknowledged that a leak through the pipe threads was not impossible, he opined that it would have taken days for enough propane to leak out to cause the explosion. During that time, the expert testified that there likely would have been a strong propane odor in the house—an odor defendant denied ever smelling."

The Court then turned to the evidence pointing to McNall as the one who turned on the valve and removed the cap:

> "According to defendant's recorded statement, he was the

last person present at the house before the explosion. Only three other people had possibly been there that day: his wife and—at least according to defendant—two people attempting to serve him legal papers. However, both his wife and the two people had left hours prior to the explosion. There was no evidence that anyone else was on the property at the time of the explosion.

"The state's expert testified that, given the diameter of the ball valve and the estimated volume of the garage, it would have taken approximately 24 minutes to fill the garage with enough propane to be capable of ignition. On the day of the explosion, defendant reported leaving his home approximately 22 minutes before the explosion occurred.

"An insurance investigator testified that defendant had taken out a new renter's insurance policy in February, just two months before the explosion. Additional evidence revealed that defendant was suffering from substantial financial difficulties."

This was enough for the Court: "Although much of it was circumstantial, that evidence was sufficient to prove that the fire was caused intentionally and that defendant was the one who caused it."

SOMEONE ELSE?

McNall was not finished, however. He contended that someone else opened the valve and removed the cap, pointing to agents of a company he was suing at the time of the explosion. The Court rejected this argument:

"At trial, the state presented testimony from the company's chief financial officer that the company had not sent agents to defendant's home on the day of the explosion. The state also presented testimony from the company's general counsel that, at the time of the explosion, the company was not yet aware of defendant's lawsuit and would not learn of it for almost a year. Crediting that testimony, the jury could have concluded that the company had no involvement in the destruction of defendant's home."

FINAL ARGUMENT

McNall had one final argument—that there was no evidence that the open ball valve was actually connected to a gas line at the time of the explosion. Again, the Court pointed to contrary evidence upon which the jury could rely: "… investigators testified that they found pipe threads inside the valve matching those that had been stripped off of the gas line."

In summary, the Court rejected the appeal and concluded there was enough admissible evidence to support the jury's conviction of McNall:

Continued on **Page 18**



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WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR YOU CONSIDER WHEN HIRING SOMEONE?

NANCY J. COOP

Everyone knows you can't choose your family, but you can choose those valuable people who work with you and your team. My dad used to say that he had two families—the one I grew up with at home and the one he developed over many years at his bobtail-building business. I wonder how he would answer this month's question. Today, in these times of COVID-19, we are facing our new employee needs using virtual recruiting and other challenges to ensure safe hiring while keeping our hiring strategies in mind as we aim to hire the best candidate. Read these insights to learn which factors rate top priority with our colleagues.

The VERBATIM column poses open-ended questions to a variety of colleagues. Adopted from a familiar "Heard on the Street" format, we offer our responders a chance to reply via email. Their personal thoughts below are in response to the question posed above. These are their replies taken verbatim in the order received.

COLLEAGUES' OPINIONS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Cultural fit and past experience are important of course, but I really look for and value drive and passion. I want to gain confidence the candidate is going to be passionate and self-motivated should they be selected.

There are many indicators of this I look for, like career progression showing increasing levels of responsibility, their commitment to their past positions and employers by staying in a role long enough to actually master the role, produce successful results, and with behavior style questions around how they have been successful and addressed challenges in their career to date.

There is a lot to learn in our industry and most of it isn't in a book or lesson plan. Having the initiative to proactively pursue the objectives of the role, in my experience, leads to creative strategies and great results.

Boyd H. McGathey
Energy Distribution Partners
Parkville, Mo.

Can do attitude! You can train for everything else!

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

One of the main attributes that I look for in a new hire is a good attitude and enthusiasm. I've found that if they have a good attitude, they usually aren't afraid of work or learning new things. If they are enthusiastic, they are eager to take on the job and usually do very well at the given job.

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

My number one quality for a new employee whether I am hiring a CSR, driver, or technician is something that embodies all our needs. I look for an ambassador for the company. Someone who provides a great experience for the customer. We want them to feel they have made the best choice in going with Proctor Gas.

That ambassador's only job is to make the customer feel valued and safe! If they have done this, they have done their job well. The CSRs are patient and kind. The drivers are polite and considerate of the customers' property, and the technicians are willing to go above and beyond to fix the appliance, leave their work area cleaner than they found it, and make sure the customer is happy before they leave, answering any questions or concerns they may have.

Judy Taranovich
Proctor Gas
Proctor, Vt.

Communication skills.

Jenni McKeen
Georgia Propane Gas Association
Marietta, Ga.

I used to say the most important factor when hiring was work ethic. According to *Wikipedia*, work ethic is a belief that hard work and diligence have a moral benefit and an inherent ability, virtue or value to strengthen character and individual abilities. It is a set of values centered on importance of work and manifested by determination or desire to work hard. I always thought you could teach skills to a person with a good work ethic. I still believe that, however I have come to realize that as a baby boomer, my

Continued on **Page 18**





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PROPANE AND THE LAW

Continued from **Page 15**

"In sum, although defendant identifies several pieces of evidence that call the state's theory into question, our role is not to re-weigh that evidence and decide whether defendant is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. So long as a rational factfinder can conclude that the state proved each element of the crime, our judicial system entrusts the jury with the responsibility of determining defendant's guilt. Although the state's case was largely circumstantial and hinged on the state's scientific evidence, we conclude that the evidence was sufficient for a reasonable jury to conclude that defendant committed both of the offenses charged."

OTHER INCIDENTS

The McNall case is far from an isolated incident. In 2006, a doctor in New York City died after opening a gas line in his townhouse. He was in the midst of a contentious divorce settlement under which he would have been required to sell the townhouse to pay his ex-wife. An explosion destroyed the building, killing the doctor and injuring 14 others. Shortly before the explosion, he sent his ex-wife an email stating that she would be "transformed from gold digger to ash and rubble digger," and that "I always told you I will leave the house only if I am dead."

And, in 2012, a natural gas explosion was intentionally set off to recover insurance proceeds. Two neighbors died, seven others were injured, and there was $4 million in property damage. A murder conviction also resulted. More on that one next month.

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

VERBATIM

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definition of work ethic is very different than that of the gen X and millennials coming up in the workplace. I now look beyond work ethic to ethics in general. I want to know that who I hire will not only make our company better but have a positive influence in the world by making it a better place to both work and live.

Steve Abbate
Cetane Associates LLC
Kent, Conn.

Our biggest consideration is whether or not the candidate is a culture fit. If a potential hire's character isn't in alignment with our company's core values, then we will not hire.

Jason Soulon
Westmor Industries
Shawnee, Kan.

There are two areas we look at closely to find the right candidate for the job.

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1. Knowledge—We are hiring them for their expertise in a certain area which we verify through open-ended questions and testing.
2. Culture—Will they "fit in" with the company culture that we have worked hard to establish? That is best achieved with multiple interviews since everyone puts on the best version of themselves for interviews.

Julie Johnson
Ted Johnson Propane
Baldwin Park, Calif.

The most important factor when hiring is the applicant's attitude. You can teach skills but with a poor attitude learning is difficult. Core values usually shape a person's attitude. A positive attitude usually is exhibited in a happier person that works well with others, treats the customer with respect, and is a reliable problem solver.

Gary France
France Propane Service
Schofield, Wis.

When I sit in on an interview, what strikes me most is that first impression. This person will be the face of our company to our customers, so having a neat appearance is very important. I am also interested in how well they complete their application. Is their writing legible, with good spelling and punctuation? Do they switch jobs often? By spending a considerable amount of time talking with them, asking questions, giving them our company background and job details, I feel this initial step helps us learn a lot about a potential employee.

Rosie Buschur
McMahan's Bottle Gas
Dayton, Ohio

I look for longevity and, also company awards and significant milestones throughout their career. I want to see hard facts versus fluff. Also, "Readability"—does their resume tell a story fluidly of overall career progression.

Hayley Karicofe
AmeriGas
Churchville, Va.

TAKE A LONG TIME TO HIRE...AND A SHORT TIME TO FIRE

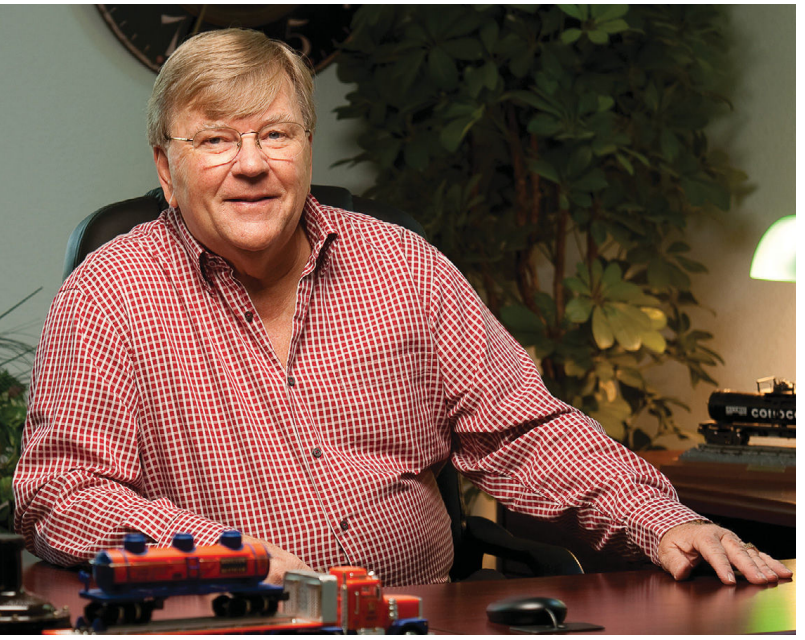
With our priorities in mind while recruiting new hires, we can choose wisely. My husband shared the wisdom of the adage "take a long time to hire and a short time to fire" with me when I was in a position of hiring people. Take your time to hire the person who meets the needs of the role you are trying to fill as well as passing the "fits in" test. If you run through all the candidates without a strong match, begin a new search round. And, if you sometimes miss the mark, accept it and take quick action to start over.

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



TIE IT DOWN, LIGHT IT UP, LOCK IT UP, HIDE THE KEYS

FRANK THOMPSON



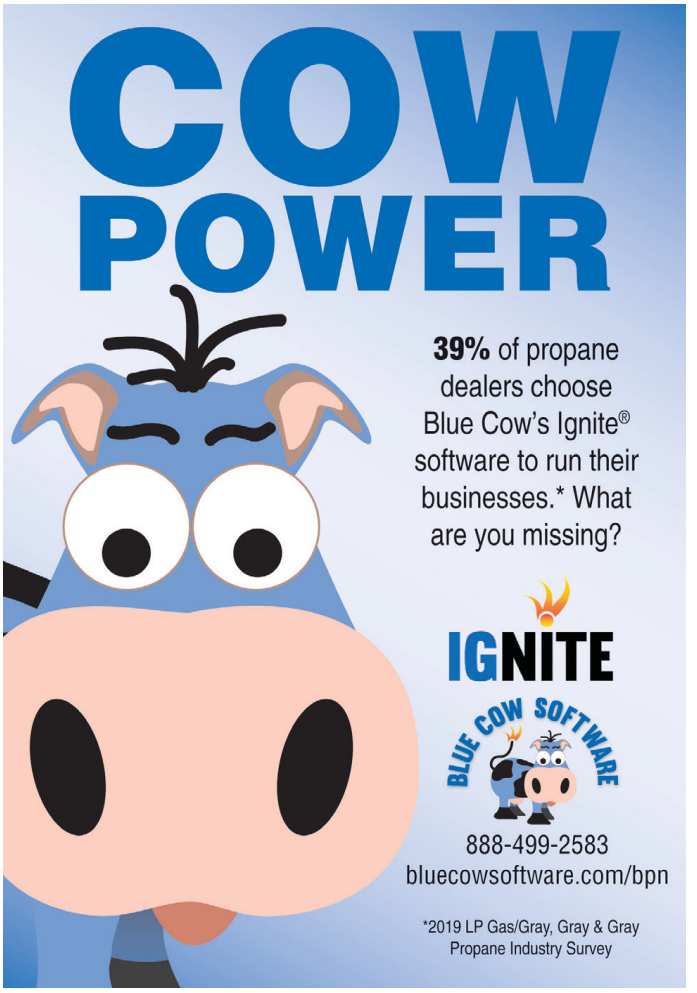
The month of July began as usual—hot and muggy with a hint of rain. Then the phones started ringing. And the craziness of the world around us seemed to be finally getting to the propane marketers.

Pickup trucks are being stolen, trailers are disappearing, buildings are being vandalized, valuable equipment is being stolen, and a new type of claim is being filed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put millions of Americans out of work, causing a sense of desperation that is getting stronger the longer the virus persists. This is increasing crime not only against property, but also against people. According to one source that I read, the national average is a robbery occurs every two minutes somewhere in the United States.

Marketers need to be vigilant at their plant sites to prevent loss of equipment or vandalism that could cost in the thousands of dollars. They need to protect their property by checking the lighting around their buildings and plant site. Trailers and equipment stored outside the fence should have extra lighting mak-





ing it less likely that you will be a target.

Install cameras to cover the entire property, especially the back and side yards. It was a security camera that caught the arsonist who set fire to a large general store in Michigan that kept a propane marketer from being drawn into that huge claim.

Cameras are inexpensive and most have Bluetooth capabilities to enable the owner to view the entire plant area using their cell phones.

By the way, many marketers have propane tanks lying around their property either waiting to be installed or recently removed from customer sites and waiting to be refurbished. Are the tanks' serial numbers recorded in the office so, if the tanks are stolen, you could prove that they belong to you? Unfortunately, many marketers store both new and old tanks out in the open without fencing.

What about the trailers stored on the back of the lot? Most marketers have a number of reasons to own trailers. Trailers are also fairly easy to steal. Pull a vehicle with a trailer hitch into the yard, back up to the trailer, drop the hitch onto the ball, hook up the chains and the lights, and the trailer is gone. What did you do to prevent the theft?

A quick search of the internet provides numerous ways to secure the trailers from being easily stolen. The easiest is to go to *amazon.com* and go to "auto trailer accessories." They have numerous types of devices to prevent or deter criminals from stealing your trailer, and pricing is from $265.00 down to $17.89, depending on the device chosen.

What do you do with the keys to your vehicles? Are all vehicles locked when parked at the end of the workday? What about the old hidden key trick? Seems that everyone hides the extra key, in the same places on or around the vehicles, making it easier for the thief. One of the vehicles reported stolen had a blackened hideout key left on the seat when it was found.

We are seeing an increase of claims from small claims courts. This may be the result of an insurance company denying a claim, or it could be from a minor fender bender where the damage was so slight that the marketer decided to pay for the physical damage out of pocket rather than turning a claim into his insurance company.

When this happens, there is no police report, usually no pictures, and the marketer was in a hurry. No information collected from the other driver because it was "*so*" minor. Until suddenly the marketer is presented with a notice that they are being sued in small claims court for the damage caused by the "minor" accident.

When they receive the small claims notice is when they call their agent to report a claim; however, there is nothing that the insurance company can do. Small claims courts do not allow attorneys to defend or make the case. It is you against the party that is suing, your memory of events compared to theirs, and their story is going to be a tearjerker—the big, bad propane company against the little guy.

And what do you have to disprove the claim? Some states have small claims

Continued on **Page 41**



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

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Mike Green, Green's Propane, Smithville, AL

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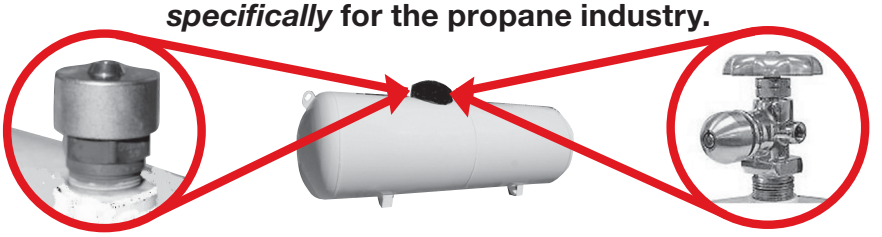

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STATE ASSOCIATIONS, PERCs REVIEW 2020, LOOK AHEAD TO 2021

PAT THORNTON

Like everyone else, state propane associations have dealt with a lot of COVID-19-related challenges this year. These challenges just added to those they had seen on their radar for a longer period of time such as the "electrify everything" movement, workforce development for the propane industry, and finding more ways to increase propane sales across the United States.

COVID-19 CHANGES THE LANDSCAPE

"MPGA (Missouri Propane Gas Association) and MOPERC (Missouri Propane Education and Research Council) replaced in-person meetings with video conferencing or conference calls," said Steve Ahrens, president/CEO of MPGA and MOPERC. "We plan to continue with online board meetings in the future, with a couple of exceptions, as it saves travel time for our volunteer leadership, some of whom travel more than four hours one way to attend."

"We are in the field doing in-person training for smaller groups while offering appropriate health protocols," Ahrens added. "Other meetings such as our eight Spring District Safety Meetings will be transitioned to webinars." While its largest event of the year, the Mid-States Propane Expo, hosted with three other state associations each year, was moved to July 2021, the Missouri Family Outing still took place as an in-person event. It was just in early October instead of during the summer.

"We were unable to hold our three conferences in-person, but met via virtual means instead," the Mid-Atlantic Propane Gas Association's Jonathan Williams said. "We hope to return to 'normal' in 2021 with regard to our conferences. If we cannot meet in-person in March, we hope to meet in July in Ocean City, Md."

"Right now we are planning an annual membership meeting in January and an open house for our new facility in May," Minnesota Propane Association's Dave Wager, executive director, explained. "We are being realistic and planning for a virtual membership meeting. Training is being planned for all in-person, but can transition to virtual or instructor-led as conditions warrant."

"The Texas Propane Gas Association has for many years utilized a communications philosophy that included weekly updates called 'Monday Morning Messenger' sent electronically along with the ability to send 'urgent updates,' usually compliance-focused or weather related," said Bill Van Hoy, the association's executive director. "These platforms were familiar to all of our members; it clearly was a fantastic asset as the COVID issue came on. I had begun the process of having the



internet and phone system migrated to a cloud-based system and in May the process was completed. It could not have come at a better time. I decided to rotate staff from the very beginning, so having only one staff member physically in the office did not reduce TPGA's ability to answer timely calls immediately. Each employee monitors all incoming calls regardless of the location any of us are."

Van Hoy said the system worked well with the association's regulatory compliance store, Propane Service Corp. "Calls and e-commerce correspondence come daily that require real people answer real questions. Shipments must be packaged and sent daily. Propane Service Corp. ramped up its e-commerce site last year and we continue to improve the site and welcome new customers from around the propane industry worldwide."

For most associations, many spring, summer, and fall meetings were cancelled or postponed across the country. In the cases of board meetings, most groups used video conferencing software such as Zoom to conduct association business. "Our North Central Convention was supposed to be in June, but we changed it to August 2021 with Minnesota and Wisconsin in La Crosse, Wis.," said Deb Grooms, CEO of the Iowa Propane Gas Association. "We held our summer board meeting in-person and had a golf outing with 46 participants. We are having our fall board meeting in person in November. We started doing our CETP/Refresher Classes at our facility in July. We limit them to 10, due to COVID. They must wear masks."

"ELECTRIFY EVERYTHING" MOVEMENT INTENSIFIES

"Don't California my Alabama," said Alabama Propane Gas Association's executive director, Lisa Hill, noting the phrase is catching on with many state associations as they plug their state name into the phrase based on the concern that stiff decarbonization regulations challenging propane and other fuels in California will be copied in other states throughout the country. In 2021, Alabama will work on proposed legislation that will protect the propane industry from being banned in areas of the state.

"Don't California my Georgia," said Jenni McKeen, who leads the Georgia Propane Gas Association. "We are working with a strong coalition in Georgia including natural gas, Southern Co., and others. We have not had legislation passed protecting the propane industry yet because of COVID and budget priorities at the legislature. We will try to get something passed soon."

Bruce Whitney, executive director of the New York Propane Gas Association, considers responding to the "electrify everything" movement a top priority, especially relating to the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) passed last year in New York. "Major benefits of propane have shown up during the pandemic from temporary hospitals and testing facilities and, most especially, New York City approving special propane use to keep restaurants and other businesses in business," Whitney said. He is working with members to help better communicate the value, versatility, and dependability. "Today and in the future, propane is cleaner and cheaper than electricity in New York," he concluded. "We have the cleanest, most economical energy that is out there." One of many concerns he shared related to new peaks in demand developing as electrification continues. "If electric heat is ultimately mandated, what will people do in interruptions in power, especially in winter? In the end, people will support what works and vote with their pocketbooks," he deducted.

"With the election behind us, we know that it's more critical than ever to communicate propane's low carbon, environmentally friendly message," commented Missouri's Ahrens, "Passing a 'ban the ban' bill in the state legislature and ensuring that propane is among the clean fuels being funded by the feds are key elements of our governmental affairs focus. We also know that energy policy will be dominated by the big utilities seeking to promote renewable projects. The state's largest electric utility, for example, wants to designate almost $2 million to incent the replacement of non-electric forklifts with electric models. The utility generates about 73% of its electricity from coal, but the program is being sold as an environmental benefit. Ratepayers need to know what the con-



This commercial driving simulator is among the hands-on, interactive stations displayed by the Be Pro Be Proud SC initiative, which is sponsored by SCPGA.

sequences are, particularly lower-income populations that will have to receive huge subsidies to underwrite any transition."

Derek Dalling leads both the Michigan and Ohio propane associations. "In Michigan, the retailers had been preparing for the battles with electric utilities for quite some time," he said. "Here, the natural gas utilities and electric utilities are one in the same. So, we have been successful in our battle with the utilities for years and we've prevented them from subsidizing natural gas expansion. However, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer gave the utilities the electricity victory by issuing an executive order to make Michigan an all-electric, fossil fuel-free state by 2050. Additionally, Gov. Whitmer created the Upper Peninsula Energy Task Force last year largely to address the Line 5 controversies. However, one of the twists we have encountered is that the UP Energy Task Force recently recommended subsidized electric expansion in the UP to put propane companies out of business. As a result of the executive order and the discussions from the UP Energy Task Force, MPGA plans to push back much more in 2021 by promoting awareness of renewable propane, potentially working with social influencers through social media promotion, and other ideas to educate propane consumers and make them proud of the clean energy they already have at their homes through their propane heat."

"Ohio has not witnessed as much of the 'electrify everything' movement yet," Dalling said. "But 'yet' is the key word. Several large cities in Ohio are already actively pursuing goals to be fossil fuel free by 2050, 2035, and one even mentioned 2030. With these local government pushes, OPGA is actively working to draft 'ban the bans' type legislation that we hope to unveil and push in 2021."

"Kansas is in a unique position compared to other states," said Greg Noll, executive vice-president of the Propane Marketers Association of Kansas. "We have not seen a drastic change pertaining to the 'electrify everything' movement, which several states have been battling for many years. We know it is coming and we plan to address it accordingly, but at this time propane is still considered a smart choice for consumers and their energy needs."

Dan Binning leads both the Colorado and New Mexico Propane Gas Associations. "In Colorado, propane faces a challenge amid the governor's efforts to reduce greenhouse gases," he pointed out. "But, propane is not a greenhouse gas like methane. We have provided a 15-page response to the governor's 180-page outline of his plans. We have encouraged the public to write to the governor's office about this short-sighted, poorly thought out plan." Binning noted that New Mexico has not had a similar challenge yet, but anticipates the likelihood of battling something in the future. "We'll react when we need to."

In Texas, the association's Van Hoy noted that it is always a great challenge to shift public perception. "We continue to support and implement programs both PERC and NPGA have rolled out," he said. "Fortunately, TPGA passed legislation that would prohibit political subdivisions from regulating electric-only areas of Texas. There are, of course, situations that come up and we actively participate in overseeing these."

"We were disappointed that propane was left out of a 'ban the bans' law when natural gas was included," said Louisiana Propane Gas Association's executive director, Randy Hayden. "Considering the high demand for propane lately with hurricanes causing a need for generators for hospitals, cell towers, etc., we are not giving up." Hayden said that many local governments make money from natural gas through locally owned natural gas systems and therefore banning propane from legislation protecting natural gas is financially motivated. "In other cases, liberals come in and try to ban everything fossil fuel-related," he said. "We are encouraged though by the 'ban the bans' on natural gas and feel propane, with its many benefits, will ultimately be included in future legislation."

BUILDING NEW PROGRAMS TO EDUCATE THE PROPANE WORKFORCE

'We're very excited about a big development for 2021," said Hill of Alabama. "We did a joint request for PERC funding with Tennessee and each received $25,000 for adding propane-related HVAC and plumbing curriculum and propane equipment. Initially, we funded a new propane lab at the Bevill State Community College in Hamilton. The lab, which includes a tankless water heater, tank water heater, range, furnace, wall heater and dryer, will be used for the hands-on portion of the state approved 3 credit hour propane elective. In addition, we've funded a ton of props, trained instructors, and set up a mentor program. We are ready to go!" Hill said with this funding they will also be able to create propane labs at Bevill State in Sumiton and Bishop State in Mobile. "Three additional Alabama community colleges each received a $10,000 PERC grant to enhance propane training. A second round of PERC

funding is underway at this time and we hope to get even more colleges funded so that we have propane labs throughout Alabama. This will allow people all over the state to receive training and certification through the regulatory board as a service tech. This will allow them to promote themselves as state certified," Hill said.

"Our new school, NC-TEC will open on April 5, 2021, for our first eight-week course," said John Jessup, president/CEO of the North Carolina Propane Gas Association. "This school will recruit and train technicians to work in the propane industry."

In South Carolina, the association's executive director, Corky Clark, noted two major accomplishments in 2020. "First, we completed the introduction of the *Overview of Propane Distribution Systems for HVAC and Plumbing Professionals* into the curriculum of 14 of our South Carolina Technical Colleges that teach HVAC and plumbing. Secondly, we became a Gold Sponsor of the Be Pro Be Proud initiative in South Carolina."

Clark said that each college received a propane furnace and propane tankless water heater for their training labs. "Our hope is that the curriculum will teach students how to install and service propane appliances and that some of the technical college graduates will be interested in starting a career in the propane industry. We are always in need of good service technicians." He described the mission of Be Pro Be Proud SC as a way to showcase skilled-profession careers abundantly found in South Carolina through displays of hands-on, interactive stations representing on-the-job experiences. "The movement aims to bring a new generation of pride and professionals to the state's skilled workforce, specifically among the student populations who are weighing their options after graduation," Clark said. "Students will learn that many of these skilled jobs are not only high-paying, but in demand, have long-term career prospects, and are only a fraction of the cost of a four-year degree. Inside the 53-foot mobile display unit, visitors will experience hands-on module simulators for commercial driving, HVAC technicians, forklift operation, utility bucket operation, diesel technology, heavy equipment operation, welding, carpentry, construction technology, and computer numerical control (CNC) machine operation."

Clark noted that in addition to the hands-on simulations, visitors will walk away with information on what it takes to start a skilled professional career. "As a Gold Sponsor, we have access to the registration database of all students and other visitors who go through the mobile display," he explained. "With that information, we can provide resource materials about the propane industry to those who have shown an interest in commercial driving and HVAC. It is estimated that 50,000 visitors will pass through the mobile display unit each year as it visits middle and high schools, career days, and job fairs throughout South Carolina."

Missouri's Ahrens said his state will continue with its Safe Appliance rebate program, which focuses on new construction or replacing non-propane appliances. "We're also working hard with home builders on Propane HomePro, which highlights new construction residential projects that feature propane throughout," he added. "Once schools get back to in-person education, we're prepared to participate with our Tech Team outreach, which provides a propane furnace and water heater to install in building trades project while providing instruction for the students."

"An extension of Tech Team will be to get a propane-based HVAC curriculum into two-year and technical schools," Ahrens said. "We're looking at how to support a 12-hour LPG Tech certificate at the secondary level as well. Another Workforce Development program we'll evaluate is Propane CONNECT, a five-state jobs board that is working to match companies needing help with job seekers looking for employment in our industry. With so much focus on reaching home builders and the technical schools, we're looking to add staff in the role of a propane advisor."

NEW STATE CHECKOFF PROGRAMS

While PERC has been in existence for more than 20 years, a few states have had checkoff programs even longer and many have added programs. Georgia is one of the latest to add a state checkoff program, which is collecting 2.5-tenths of a cent per gallon. "We are just getting started collecting the funds," said Georgia's McKeen. "We are not ready to spend the money just yet. Expanding rebate programs and reaching out to HVAC, plumbers, contractors, and other decision makers will be a priority."

South Carolina's Clark said his association was about to begin a legislative push for a state checkoff program just as COVID



hit. "We need that to supplement our national funding from PERC so we can provide advertising and appliance rebates to promote propane. Depending on what the legislature does beginning in January, we will either restart our state checkoff program efforts in 2021 or 2022."

Michigan's Dalling shared that despite balancing numerous COVID-related executive orders, the UP Energy Task Force, and the executive order to electrify Michigan by 2050, the Michigan association has remained hard at work on legislation to create a Michigan state checkoff program to supplement the national PERC program. "We are close to finalizing the legislation and sending it to Gov. Whitmer for her signature," he said. "If we are successful with the checkoff program in December, then we anticipate working with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to create the rules to begin the program in 2021."



Marketing propane prior to a Louisiana Tech football game are this year's Miss Louisiana, Courtney Hammons, and the executive director of the Louisiana Propane Gas Association, Randy Hayden.

If they move forward, getting a marketer on board would not be hard."

Clark said the association has worked diligently to promote propane for school buses in South Carolina. "All school buses are owned and operated by the S.C. Department of Education. Our S.C. Department of Insurance was designated the beneficiary of S.C.'s VW Settlement Funds," he explained. "I testified at Insurance Department hearings on how our VW funds should be utilized. The first award from S.C.'s $34 million total allotment was $9.3 million, of which $7.8 million went to the S.C. Department of Education for propane school buses. A total of 78 new Thomas school buses were delivered to the Department of Education this spring. This brings the total number of school buses funded by VW settlement funds to 217 school buses." In North Carolina, Jessup also reported getting $1.2 million in VW funds for propane buses.

Dalling also said that Ohio was able to pass legislation last year to create an Ohio state checkoff program. "OPGA hoped to finalize the rules and have the checkoff program operational this year. The COVID pandemic halted the work on the checkoff program for several months," he added. "OPGA is pleased to report that it is working closely with the Ohio Department of Agriculture now and is close to finalizing the program and having the checkoff program operational. OPGA expects a referendum vote from all Ohio propane retailers in 2021 and assuming the referendum vote approves the checkoff program, it will be operational in 2021."

OTHER GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

"Our state PERC and MOPERC continue to evaluate how to increase the number of propane burner tips in the state," said Missouri's Ahrens. "Our primary focus is residential, but we also know that, with 3 billion gallons of gasoline and diesel fuel sold in the transportation sector, there are gains to be made with fleets. It feels that we are at a point where the 'same old, same old' isn't going to be helpful. The velocity of electrification is exponentially greater than the progress toward our best bet, renewable propane. Creating programs and hoping marketers take advantage is the standard approach, but we need to be more aggressive. We need to help create demand and then match it with a supplier, rather than the hands-off approach. One idea is to underwrite a propane-powered shuttle for transit/paratransit use by local jurisdictions. We'd pay for the vehicle wrap, the fuel, and work with the agency to sell them on propane.

The Louisiana Propane Gas Association has been active in the Clean Fuels Clean Cities Coalition for several years and the association's executive director, Randy Hayden, is also the chairman of the coalition this year. "We are pleased that half of the state's $18 million in Volkswagen Settlement dollars have gone toward adding propane school buses," he said. "We have also been aggressively marketing propane via our outreach at Louisiana College football games and through our partnership with the Miss Louisiana program. We are scheduled to tailgate at two football games per weekend, but COVID has caused some cancellations. We are also doing a $150,000 television advertising campaign with this year's Miss Louisiana, Courtney Hammons, as spokesperson."

HONORING JOE PORCO THROUGH SCHOLARSHIP AND NEWSLETTER

New York's Whitney said that his association is developing a scholarship and a second member communication newsletter in honor of Joe Porco, who died earlier this year. "He had a wealth of knowledge about the industry and its opportunities," Whitney said. "He is truly missed and, in his honor and memory, we are developing a significant scholarship for students within the industry. We are also creating a second newsletter to help associate members/vendors to share information on people, products and places with marketer members. The second newsletter will be called, 'HEY JOE, WHAT DO YOU KNOW?' This will be fitting considering Joe's reputation for being a resource of good ideas and his willingness to help and share information with all." ■

A NEW "ENERGY FUTURE"?

JOE COLANERI

Every four years, political pundits, historians, and other observers of our political process proclaim that this is the most important election in our history and that the future of democracy is at stake.

This year's election was influenced by a 100-year pandemic, so the institutional challenges and democratic vulnerabilities were likely impacted and exacerbated more than in so-called normal election cycles.

"THE MOST CONSEQUENTIAL ELECTION EVER?"

The elegant aspect of America's election process is that we vote nationally from the 30,000-ft level for president and we vote at the local grassroots level for Congress.

The vote for president is essentially a vote for national approach and policy direction and the vote for Congress is for the details and how policy impacts at the local level. This is intended to provide a check from 30,000 feet down to the local level.

This year, however, the presidential vote for President-elect Biden seems to have reflected a desire on the part of the voters for so-called "reflective governance" and a return to the norms and sanctions that typically have shaped our politics since the nation's founding—a behavioral process that shapes major and incremental approaches to policy-making.

Historians will analyze the impact of the national shift in the voting preferences in 2016 that gave rise to Trump's governing style—and that's not the purpose of this article—but the shift in governing approach is significant, and the scope of Biden's popular vote margin and strong Electoral College margin provides a likely national policy mandate the propane industry will have to examine and react to.

The Biden victory suggests that an abrupt shift in governing style is coming and the intensity of Biden's voters as with Trump's in 2016 suggests that policy change may be significant as well.

"OF TRADITION, ESTABLISHMENT, AND POLICY"

The 2020 election results suggest public support for a more traditional governing style at the presidential level that recognizes norms and sanctions, but the results at the congressional level suggest the country writ large does not want the kind of major change a so-called blue wave would have indicated. The American people voted for divided government once again.

But the unknown is how far the anti-Trump intensity on the Democratic side will drive the Biden Administration. Biden's voters can argue that his 51% of the popular vote and 306 electoral votes provide enough of a mandate to pursue "significant elements" of the so-called "Green New Deal" and tax reform that replaces some if not all of the 2017 tax reform changes.

"NEW GOVERNING PARADIGMS"

The Obama and Trump Administrations, faced with divided government after the 2010 and 2018 mid-terms, respectively, began to govern by executive order. Biden may be no different in his attempt to satisfy the base of voters who elected him.

In many ways that base runs through the Midwest blue wall Biden rebuilt in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, and the Sunbelt wall he began to crack open in Georgia and Arizona.

While Trump offered the propane industry an opportunity to reverse onerous job-killing regulations by leveraging propane country in the states that made Trump president, so now can those same states provide propane the op-



portunity to work with the Biden Administration on executive actions that reflect this very same Midwest constituency. At the same time opening policy dialogue in the Sunbelt states that provide New Democratic paths the future national victory.

The industry is ideally situated with its strong grassroots program to reshape its priorities with Biden, who will be mindful of this critical constituency.

Propane's blue wall business future runs through Biden's blue wall political future and propane's Sunbelt constituency is Biden's political imperative.

No industry is better positioned to forge relationships with the incoming Biden Administration than is propane, given its fortuitous and natural constituencies, its clean fuel properties, and its importance in the apparent bipartisan infrastructure program Biden will undertake beginning in 2021.

"TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN"

In a real sense, the propane industry is facing the same set of challenges from a different set of perspectives. The vexing regulations that could have been addressed and corrected under Trump will now be the challenges to be addressed under Biden.

New advocacy tools being used by many companies and trade associations can now be implemented and tested by the propane industry at the state and federal level. Some examples:

- Inter-industry issues coalitions and partnerships
- Industry task forces for regulations, tax, funding, grants
- Specific industry working groups on infrastructure, the highway bill, tax reform and extenders, appropriations and funding requests
- New market policy development such as for ports, resilience, health sector, state and local, military

"THE BIDEN BASE AND ITS CHALLENGES"

After 2016 we heard much about the Trump base and how it drove policy and politics during his term. Biden's definitive election in the popular vote and Electoral College and the support received from the progressive wing of the party will present unavoidable challenges to the propane industry. The progressive agenda, which in many ways represents an existential threat to the propane industry, will now have its moment and the industry will have to confront it. Biden will expect to implement an agenda, and while a divided Congress may moderate some of the more challenging policies, there is much he'll be able to do administratively.

Here is a list of advocacy action items the industry should consider implementing when confronting the new politics of 2021.

- Develop a comprehensive policy strategy and proposals for resilience, infrastructure, highways, taxes, and appropriations
- Work with NPGA members on federal funding requests in the FY '22 cycle
- Form policy and project partnerships with other clean energy sources including EVs
- Engage actively climate czar John Kerry
- Use the tax code to drive new propane markets
- Form and join inter-industry advocacy coalitions
- Work on highway and infrastructure bills
- Develop a COVID clean energy strategy
- Develop a California propane strategy

"THE CALIFORNIA CHALLENGE CASE STUDY"

California is in many ways a metaphor and a cautionary tale for what the future could hold for the propane industry– seemingly endless challenges to its traditional businesses and loss of market share unless it changes the narrative and organizes.

A major threat is from EVs that have put down a powerful marker in California and plan to go national with their message. They have commitment and money and a new national trade association—the Zero Emission Transportation Association. They have Elon Musk and now they'll have willing allies inside EPA and the new White House Climate Change Office headed by John Kerry that will have a highly visible national and international platform and the full support of the president.

The clean fossil fuels will have to organize a major effort to counter this EV effort, perhaps in California to start, but it has to be a national effort with technical, advocacy, and strategic communications capability.

The EVs have always taken a long view and now with Biden, they'll feel it's their turn to propose policy whether it's legislative or administrative.

So the issue comes down to propane and other clean fuel stakeholders leading an effort, a well-founded effort to counter the growing influence of the EV industry in California and nationally.

Should the propane industry fail to meet this challenge, it will likely begin a slow decline that leaves it diminished and marginalized as an American energy source.

So this is all about an inevitable transition to a new national energy, environmental, and economic paradigm.

The propane industry can be part of this national energy conversation, but it will take vision and strategy, and organization to be part of this rigorous clean energy debate, indeed, this battle for America's energy and economic future.

Joe Colaneri is a partner at AJW Inc., a Washington, D.C.- and Sacramento, Calif.-based public policy and advocacy firm. He was previously executive director of the Propane Vehicle Council from 1996-2002.

PROPANE education & research COUNCIL



POWERING MORE FOR INDUSTRY FLEETS





PROPANE CAN DO THAT®

For propane professionals, the benefits of transitioning your fleet vehicles to propane autogas add up fast. You get the cost savings, operational advantages, and environmental benefits—plus you display your confidence in propane to your customers. Add it all together, and choosing propane autogas instead of diesel or gasoline is the right choice.

- **Read the following pages to learn why, or visit Propane.com/IndustryFleets for assistance getting started.**

THERE'S ALWAYS A REASON TO SWITCH.



It's not hard to find reasons to convert your vehicle fleet to propane autogas. But many propane marketers have been hesitant to make the change. No matter the reason, the following points prove why propane autogas should be an obvious choice for propane professionals.

BETTER MAINTENANCE SAVINGS

According to a real-life case study of two nearly identical propane autogas and diesel trucks spanning five years, propane repair and maintenance costs were 55 percent less than that of diesel. That means a lower total cost-of-ownership and less downtime for your fleet — plus reliable performance in cold weather.

MORE OEM-DEDICATED VEHICLE OPTIONS

From CARB-certified bobtails to a selection of service trucks, light-duty vehicles, vans, and more, propane offers more versatility and selection than ever before.

MORE CONVERSION OPPORTUNITIES

Propane autogas offers multiple conversion options for a number of preferred platforms. Vehicles that are converted to propane autogas enjoy the same benefits as OEM models.





HERE'S WHY NEARLY

58,000

FLEET VEHICLES IN AMERICA

ARE POWERED BY PROPANE



PROVEN TECHNOLOGY



CLEANER PERFORMANCE



EASY REFUELING



MORE UPTIME

FASTER RETURN ON INVESTMENT

While the additional upfront cost investment for propane vehicles ranges from $6,000–$20,000, a much lower total cost-of-ownership leads to a large return-on-investment. Efficient propane autogas vehicles provide a net-positive ROI within 24–36 months — and the savings are even greater for industry fleets.

IMPROVED DEALER SUPPORT

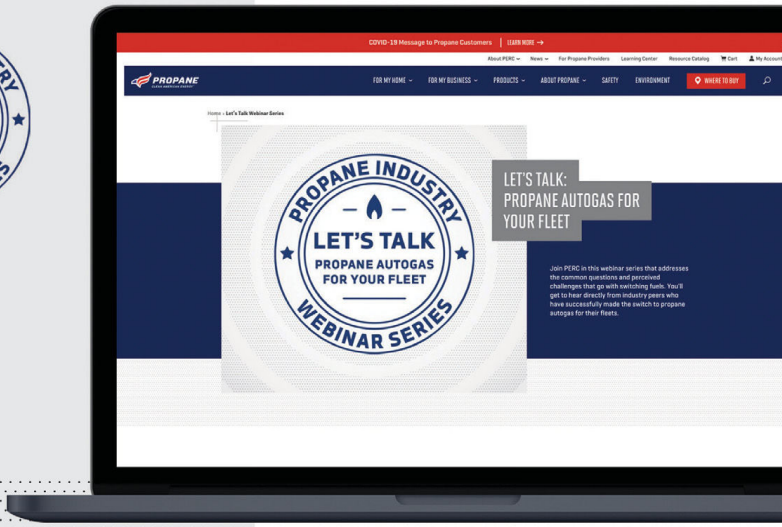
With OEM and aftermarket partners who continue to grow and train their own service networks nationwide, the support infrastructure for propane autogas vehicles is getting stronger by the day. For example, Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp, Roush CleanTech, Alliance Autogas, and ICOM are just a few of the industry leaders building a bigger, better dealer support system for their customers.

LET'S TALK

PROPANE INDUSTRY
LET'S TALK
PROPANE AUTOGAS FOR YOUR FLEET
WEBINAR SERIES

This webinar series lets you learn directly from industry-leading voices about vehicle offerings, technologies, and even their own experiences with propane autogas.

Find a topic that interests you at Propane.com/LetsTalk.



CASE STUDY | SUPERIOR PLUS PROPANE

DRIVING DOWN COSTS

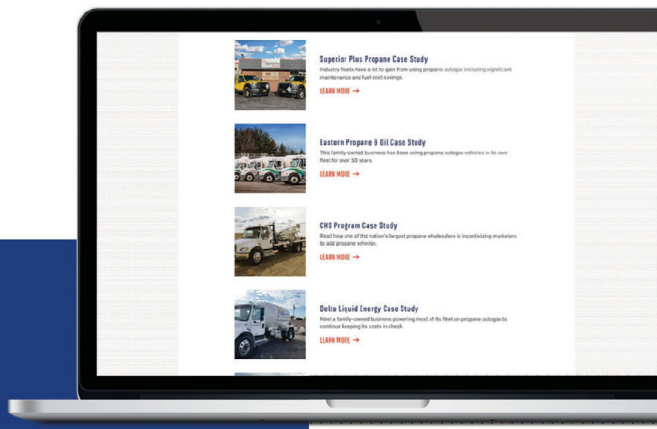


Superior Plus Propane in Rochester, New York tracked the performance and costs of two propane autogas F-550s and two nearly identical diesel F-550s for more than four years. The result: Propane autogas delivered a total cost-per-mile that was less than half of diesel.

COST AVERAGES

Fuel	Maintenance Cost / Mile	Fuel Cost / Mile	Total Cost / Mile
Propane Autogas	$0.06	$0.18	**$0.24**
Diesel	$0.24	$0.28	**$0.53**

Discover how fleets of all kinds are reducing total cost-of-ownership and greening up their business with propane autogas at Propane.com/Proven.





HOW TO GET STARTED

No matter where you're at in the decision making process, or what type of fleet you have, we're here to help you every step of the way.

Visit Propane.com/IndustryFleets for more help with how to put propane autogas to work for your business.

PROPANE education & research COUNCIL

THE PROPANE EDUCATION & RESEARCH COUNCIL was authorized by the U.S. Congress with the passage of Public Law 104-284, the Propane Education and Research Act (PERA), signed into law on October 11, 1996. The mission of the Propane Education & Research Council is to promote the safe, efficient use of odorized propane gas as a preferred energy source.

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16 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE SPECCING SERVICE OR CRANE TRUCKS

STEVE RELYEA

As you're selecting the chassis and equipment for a new service truck or crane truck, you should also be thinking about your business, how it has changed since you last bought a truck, and how it may change over the next several years. Ready with that information, you will be better able to work with a truck builder to create a truck that will meet your needs throughout its operating life.

Ten representatives of propane truck builders and truck equipment manufacturers shared with ***BPN*** some questions buyers should be prepared to answer when they sit down with a builder to spec out a new work truck.



Load King, a subsidiary of Custom Truck One Source, offers the Voyager P propane service body. Available on a Ford F-550 chassis and built specifically for propane marketers, the Voyager P features an all-aluminum bed, side rails, and headache rack with E-Track. It's equipped with a Load King crane that lifts up to 7500 pounds and reaches 22.0 feet fully extended. Standard features include Rumber flooring, a concrete block storage holder under the body, and LED compartment light kits in the storage boxes. *loadkingmfg.com/service-trucks/voyager-p/*

What operations will the truck be used to perform?

Knowing how the truck will be used will help determine the model and equipment that will serve you best. "I start out by asking the customer to tell me about their business," said Jason Soulon, regional sales manager for Westmor Industries (Morris, Minn.). "Are they carrying cylinders, or 500s, or 1000s? Are they using the truck every day? How many tank sets are they doing per day?" The number and size of tanks you want to haul at once will tell you the length of the body. The anticipated payload will tell you the GVWR you will require in a truck. Your willingness to set a tank where the customer wants it, even if it's far from where the truck can park, will determine the reach you'll need in a crane. "I just ask the customer to talk so I can get a 10,000-foot view of their business," Soulon added. "If you are going to own the truck for six, seven, eight, or nine years, you need to think about what your business is going to grow into."

What size tanks will you be moving, and where will you be moving them?

When buying a crane truck, these questions will help you determine how much reach and how much weight capacity you need. Knuckleboom cranes have a longer reach, but stick cranes are more popular. "At the end of the day, the serviceman wants to set a tank where it is most easily accessible," explained Jerry Jones, co-owner and vice president of Pacific Truck Tank (Sacramento, Calif.). A 21-foot reach is most common, but a 30-foot reach is becoming more popular. "For the price difference, guys want the extra nine feet of reach, even though most of them want to set the tank close."



H&H Sales Co. offers a crane truck that features aluminum service box construction; Rumber rubberized tongue and groove flooring; swing-down side railing; and a radio remote-operated and fully hydraulic crane. It is available with a choice of bed lengths: 10-ft, 12-ft, 14-ft, and 16-ft. The company has 70 years' experience building equipment for the propane industry. *hhsalescompany.com*

What is the largest tank you are going to transport and set with the truck?

"If it's a 1000, you'll want a truck with at least a 14-foot body so the majority of the length of the tank is on the truck bed floor, to keep it level," said John Hawkins, CEO of H&H Sales Co. (Huntertown, Ind.). "If you want a liftgate, you'll want to go to a longer, 16-foot body." If the truck is going to be used for service work as well as tank setting, you might want to consider a 22,000 GVWR chassis, like the Ford F-600 or the Chevrolet Silverado C6500, rather than the 19,500 GVWR that has been commonly used. "The amount of equipment people want to haul will put a load on the 19,500 GVWR truck, especially if it's going to be a multipurpose truck that is used for not just tank sets, but also service work."



Palfinger says its PSC 6025 is the lightest crane in its class providing increased payload capacity. It provides 25 feet of horizontal reach and has an excellent working lift chart for the propane industry. It also provides fully proportional functions that are available on the standard remote control for safely and accurately handling propane tanks. This unit is equipped with Palfinger's new boom tip work lights, which are controlled from the remote control. The PSC 6025 service crane is pictured here on a new Signature Truck Systems Linebacker with custom aluminum body, recently delivered to Rutland Bottle Gas in Ohio. *palfinger.com*

Who will service the hydraulic equipment?

Anthony Gentile at truck equipment manufacturer Omaha Standard Palfinger (Council Bluffs, Iowa) suggested asking about the hydraulic equipment. As regional sales manager—eastern and national key account manager of work truck bodies & lifting systems, he advises buyers to ask: Will operator training be provided for the hydraulic equipment? What are the service requirements for it? Where and how can I get service for it? What is the warranty on the components? Beyond these concerns, Gentile said buyers of crane trucks generally ask about new features; payload availability; and warranty coverage on the entire unit, if any. "Larger fleet customers normally have standard specification requirements," he reported. "Smaller fleet customers may know what they want to do with the new unit, but not exactly what chassis, body, and crane they need. More often than not, they ask for guidance from the truck builder in regards to updates on a new chassis, crane, body features, and/or regulations."

What will you be carrying and what kind of storage will it require?

If you have components that you want to keep out of the weather, such as HVAC parts, Eric Salinas, general manager at the Houghton Lake facility of Signature Truck Systems (Clio, Mich.), suggested building your service truck on an extended cab pickup. "With an extended cab, you can keep sensitive components in the cab, without having to squeeze it in behind the seats," he explained. On any truck, cabinet sizing, storage systems, materials, and tie-down locations can be customized to secure the cargo you know you'll carry. Mike VanDenBoom, president of Signature Truck Systems, suggested also telling the truck builder of any in-cab equipment the serviceman might use, such as a tablet. "We ask if there is anything inside the cab they want us to install," he said. "We want to deliver a turnkey truck that is ready to go on day one."

How wide is your service area?

This will help you determine how much storage you'll need. "If you are out 35 miles from the office, you want to make sure you have all the parts you'll need," said Wayne Terpstra of Custom Truck One Source (Kansas City, Mo.). "That will save time, because you won't have to run back." The answer here is cabinets—having enough of them and the right kind. "Fittings, regulators, tools, straps... it's amazing how quickly a guy will fill that up."

What material do you want used for the storage cabinets?

Choices include aluminum, stainless steel, and steel that is painted. Most buyers choose aluminum in order to save weight. "Everything you add to the truck, adds weight," explained Salinas of Signature Truck Systems. "We make sure we are mindful of the total weight to make a useful truck." Some buyers favor stainless steel or mirror stainless. "They want that show look and bling factor. They like that shiny surface on as many items as possible." VanDenBoom of Signature Truck Systems added, "Many marketers take advantage of the large, smooth aluminum doors on our Linebacker to display their logo or specific advertising"



Signature Truck Systems offers the Linebacker, a custom crane truck built for the propane industry. This 16.5-ft LPG technicians' service body is for 22,500 GVW vehicles. Designed to each customer's needs, the Linebacker is available with an aluminum body and cabinets in any configuration; Venturo and Palfinger cranes in many sizes; radio remote control; hydraulic or manual outriggers; a non-slip rubber floor; and liftgate and winch options. It is designed to carry two 1000-gal tanks and more. *signaturetruckllc.com/linebacker/*

Do you know about the latest innovations?

Hydraulic truck equipment manufacturer Stellar Industries (Garner, Iowa) has added two innovations to its product line that may be new since the last time you bought a truck. One is an aluminum LP crane body, which was introduced within the last three years. "Customers have really appreciated the weight savings aluminum offers along with corrosion resistance," said Adam Oppermann, product manager. The second innovation is the evolution of the handheld crane remote. For instance, the Stellar CDTplus crane remote features an LCD screen that shows an operator how far out the crane is, how much weight is being lifted, and how much more it can lift. It also alerts an operator as the crane gets close to its maximum lifting capacity by increasing vibrations as it nears the maximum capacity. "This allows the operator to keep their eyes on the lift and not having to look down at the remote, making it safer for everyone in the area," Oppermann explained.



The Venturo HT45KX crane is perfect for propane service truck applications. It has a 7800 lb maximum capacity, a 25-ft long boom capable of handling a 500-gal tank at maximum extension and the exclusive VLC logic and safety control system. The system includes a handheld radio remote, precise overload control, multiple operator alerts, an LCD display screen, and built-in stability control. The Venturo HT45KX and its exclusive VLC controller is pictured here on the Linebacker crane service truck built by Signature Truck Systems. *venturo.com*

Do you want to equip your crane with the latest safety equipment?

Automatic safety systems began appearing on cranes in the 1990s, but they've become more prominent in the last five years. "The same thing that happened in the auto industry has happened in the crane industry," said Brett Collins, owner/president of crane manufacturer Venco Venturo Industries (Cincinnati, Ohio). "Cars went from



Starting in 2021, Westmor will stock LP crane trucks. There will be a variety of Ford and Chevy chassis, including a new 22,000 GVWR option. The higher GVWR option provides ample payload capacity to reduce the risk of overloading the vehicle. *westmor-ind.com*

carburetors to ECMs; the same has happened in cranes, with safety systems, sensors, and programmable logic controls." The technologies offering safety-related benefits include vehicle stability and grade indications, overload protection, and warnings of malfunctions. "There are multiple alerts that tell you if you are doing something wrong," Collins explained. "These systems can help compensate for operator error. Even if a guy tries to do something he shouldn't, these will stop him."

Do you want to equip your truck with the latest safety systems?

Two options that have been growing in popularity in the last two or three years are back-up cameras and rear obstacle detection systems, reported Soulon of Westmor Industries. "I've seen data that the biggest expenses related to accidents are backing accidents," he explained. "That's especially true when trucks operate around trees and garages." A back-up camera provides cheap insurance to prevent such accidents, and a rear obstacle detection system supplements that by giving the driver an audible warning. "These are now reasonably reliable and more affordable than they used to be," Soulon said. "They're not cheap cheap, but they will pay for themselves if they prevent an accident."

Have you considered these details?

Oppermann of Stellar Industries suggested several basic questions to consider when choosing an LP crane and body. What size of crane is needed? "This is based on the reach needed of the crane and the weight of the tanks they'll be lifting," he noted. Will the crane be on the curbside or the street side? Is a lift gate or a workbench-style bumper better suited to your needs? What type of stabilizers do you need? "For example, manual out, manual down or power out, power down?" What length of body is needed? "This is usually based on the size of the tanks and amount of storage needed for equipment and parts." How many tank saddles are needed on the body? Is corrosion and/or payload an issue? "This helps determine if a steel body or aluminum body would be better suited to their needs." What do you want to go in the compartments to hold equipment and parts? "This is used to determine the type and how many drawer sets and shelves are needed in the body," Oppermann added.



Kurtz Truck Equipment reports its crane bodies are built in its shop, not bought. When it comes to your crane truck, the company says, "If you can dream it (and it's legal) we can build it from scatch." *kurtztruckequipment.com*

What kinds of equipment are your peers using?

One way to make sure you're aware of the latest options and are considering everything you'll need, is to see what kind of equipment others in the industry are using. "We show people pictures of trucks we've built in the past," said Roger Smith, general manager and vice president of marketing, propane sales, at Kurtz Truck Equipment (Marathon, N.Y.). "They take bits and pieces of each and design their own." That's es-



The Stellar TMAX Propane and LP Gas Service Trucks from Stellar Industries Inc. are extremely versatile. They make transporting, loading, and unloading gas cylinders a simple, single-person operation without the need for a trailer or additional setting equipment. Shown here is the Stellar TMAX LP-12-ft Aluminum body with a 7621 crane. *stellarindustries.com*

pecially true when it comes to storage cabinets, he added. “Most people’s biggest concern is storage. For some people, it’s a security blanket. The more cabinets they have, the more they can carry.”

What’s it all going to weigh?

When specifying the equipment to be added to the truck, consider its weight. “If it’s a 19,500 GVWR truck, by the time you add a couple of tanks, the tools, and the driver, you can be at the top end GVWR of the truck,” said Terpstra of Custom Truck One Source. “You want to stay legal and safe, and you don’t want to wear out the truck over time. When you’re at the top end of the truck’s capacity, you’re putting stress on it and it will wear out faster.” To save weight, he added, most buyers are going with aluminum truck bodies. “That way, they can put more payload on the truck because the bed and body are not as heavy.”

Where will you have the truck serviced?

When selecting a chassis, consider where you will have the truck serviced. If you have already have a dealer service shop you know and trust, that will help you make the choice. At Pacific Truck Tank, the chassis most commonly used for crane trucks are the Ram 5500 and the Ford F-550, typically equipped with up to a 7000-pound crane. “Trucks are a personal preference,” said Jones. “I usually ask the buyer which dealer is closest or has the best service.”

What kind of engine do you want?

H&H Sales Co. is seeing more customers buy crane trucks with gasoline engines, especially the new Ford 7.3-liter. “A customer just picked up one and he was really impressed with the power,” said Hawkins. H&H Sales Co. also converts that motor to propane using dual-fuel systems from Alliance AutoGas or ICOM. Just make sure there is a shop in your location that will work on a propane or dual-fuel engine, Hawkins suggested. Gasoline and dual-fuel engines are gaining ground because diesel engines are more expensive to buy and they require more frequent oil changes and filter replacements.



Pacific Truck Tank custom built this crane truck for the folks at Hunt Propane. It features a Stellar 7621 curbside-mounted crane and TMAX 1 service body with a 1500-lb rear liftgate, mounted on a 2020 Ram C5500 cab and chassis. The crane and outriggers are fully hydraulic and this 7621 crane is remotely controlled as well. *pacifictrucktank.com*

What do other customers of the truck builder say?

Before selecting all the equipment, you’ll be selecting a truck builder. Smith of Kurtz Truck Equipment suggests asking each builder for references and then talking with those customers. “The biggest thing is, buy your crane truck from someone who is known for quality,” he said. “I advise talking to different manufacturers, getting references, and talking to their customers. That way, you’ll end up with a truck you will be happy with.”

With your answers to these and other questions, a truck builder can customize a truck to the jobs you expect it to do, the loads it will be hauling, the terrain it will be covering, and the personal preferences of both the business owner and the driver/technician. When it hits the road, that truck should deliver state-of-the-art safety and productivity. ■



A Palfinger PK 8.501 SLD 3 crane, knuckleboom extension to 31 feet, is shown here on a Ford F-550 chassis with a Signature Truck Systems 12-ft aluminum Linebacker body with Rumber flooring. *palfinger.com*

CYLINDER REQUALIFICATION CHANGES AND CLARIFICATION

PAT THORNTON



Photo courtesy AmeriGas

On Oct. 30, 2020, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) of the Department of Transportation (DOT) published a final rule announcing its approval of the National Propane Gas Association's (NPGA) petition on the requalification of DOT-specification cylinders by hydrostatic testing, also known as volumetric expansion testing method.

In 2017, PHMSA changed the requalification period for the hydrostatic and proof pressure testing methods without providing any rationale or substantiation for the changes or addressing them in any form as required by the Administrative Procedures Act, according to Sarah Reboli, NPGA's senior counsel, regulatory and industry affairs. "NPGA engaged PHMSA immediately because the altered requalification periods negatively impacted millions of propane cylinders in the marketplace, and the change was without any safety basis," Reboli said. "To temporarily correct its mistake, PHMSA issued an Enforcement Discretion document that allowed the requalification of DOT-specification cylinders by volumetric testing according to either a 12- or a 10-year period."

"Through a petition and rulemaking, NPGA secured a return to the 12-year requalification period for initial and subsequent requalification periods by volumetric testing as well as extending the initial requalification period to 12 years for the proof pressure method," Reboli said. "NPGA created a simple chart for marketers to review the new requalification periods. It is also available along with a fact sheet, **Fact Sheet: DOT Cylinder Requalification Periods** on NPGA's Member Dashboard."

The final rule took effect on Nov. 30, 2020, and applies to all DOT-specification cylinders, including those currently in-use. The relevant regulatory materials are available on NPGA's Member Dashboard. According to Reboli, none of these changes affect the 5-year visual inspection for cylinders.

Chris Wagner, director of compliance and regulatory affairs for AmeriGas, described the numerous challenges of the original change from 12 years to 10 years for the requalification. "This change caused a significant and immediate impact to the industry. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions of containers ranging in size from 20 to 420-pounds, were suddenly out of qualification. These were cylinders that should have had two additional years of qualification remaining." Wagner, who serves on the Regulatory Task Force of the Governmental Affairs Committee with NPGA and as vice-chair of the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) Safety and Technical Training Working Group, was an industry representative in a meeting at DOT to explain the urgent need for a rule change.

"In addition to the huge financial cost to have so many containers prematurely removed from qualification, it was important that they knew there were countless logistical challenges as well," Wagner said. "The change came right in the busiest part of January and in many parts of the country, larger containers were under snow and ice and had to go out of service as it was impossible to requalify them under the conditions. Some customers saw the challenge as bad customer service or an excuse to charge them more. With the smaller cylinders, there were communications challenges between retailers, cylinder exchanges, and customers as well. Dispensers had to relearn the requirements. While we did get the discretionary notice, there was also confusion as some local jurisdictions did not recognize or accept the discretionary notice when it was released. It still was not the official rule."

In addition, in his role with PERC, Wagner had to help navigate the updating of training materials. "With a variety of acceptable approaches to requalification throughout the country, it was not possible to provide universally accepted training materials." While more and more training materials are available online, Wagner noted that printed materials are more commonly used at dispenser distribution points. "It is important that the latest, most up-to-date training is in the hands of the staff at these dispenser operations."

Reboli also noted that NPGA had sought clarification on the cost for training materials regarding cylinder requalification. "We learned of confusion within the industry as to whether federal regulation 49 C.F.R. 180.209(g) requires marketers to specifically purchase training documents referenced in the regulation," Reboli said. "Part 180.209(g) covers the performance of external visual cylinder requalification."

Through outreach to PHMSA, NPGA received clarification that facilities performing external visual inspections to requalify cylinders are *not* required to purchase the information from any particular organization. "There are existing PERC training materials that detail the same type of information contained in the referenced documents," Reboli explained. "These materials are available at a nomimal cost or no cost to a marketer." NPGA has a fact sheet, **Fact Sheet: DOT Cylinder Requalification Training Materials** available on its Member Dashboard at *npga.org*. ■



Michael Jarman, service manager for Tidewater Energy, performing a start-up on a new Kohler 20KW RCA–QS generator.

TIDEWATER ENERGY'S SALES OF PROPANE GENERATORS BALLOONING

KAREN MASSMAN VanASDALE

This year, Tidewater Energy, a family-owned propane company serving primarily rural customers in eastern North Carolina, has seen explosive growth in the sales of propane generators thanks to an innovative marketing program with Kohler. The program uses an online platform and its accompanying marketing services, PowerChord, and has helped increase Tidewater's sales leads 80% in all of its seven offices.

Annually, Tidewater typically sells only a handful of propane generators, although it installs and services generators purchased from other providers and big-box retailers such as Home Depot and Lowe's.

"Our main business is propane," said Wendell Whitman, manager of Tidewater Energy—La Grande. "What was happening, we ended up doing a lot of service work on generators. So it became obvious to us we probably ought to be trying to sell generators.

"We went from the first three or four years selling one or two generators. We've sold 50 or 60 this year, and I contribute it all to PowerChord," he said. With the increased sales, it has also brought new customers who need installation and regular servicing of the generators.

Tidewater began using the PowerChord online platform and advertising options in January. When COVID-19 forced residents to stay home, Tidewater was positioned to be more visible to online shoppers—especially those living in rural areas, which are the majority of Tidewater's customers. An early hurricane season also contributed to the ballooning sales.

Most of Tidewater's sales are residential customers who



spend $9000 to $11,000 for a propane generator, depending on the size of the generator and how it is installed, Whitman said. Prior to using PowerChord, most of Tidewater's generator sales were word-of-mouth referrals from other customers or service technicians.

Propane generator sales and services are now a key part of Tidewater's growth. If the pace of sales continues, it may become a business within a business, Whitman added. In addition to the increased servicing, the sales process following up with increased leads takes resources. Because of the various local restrictions and building codes, there's an educational process involved with the sale of generators, which takes more manpower.

"I mean, it's not hard to educate them (customers), but you've got to take the time to do it," Whitman said. "That's one of the things I think that we do a good job with in our service department. We provide customer service and take time to talk to them and make sure they understand what they're getting."

KOHLER AND POWERCHORD

PowerChord is the lead management and distribution platform and marketing company offering solutions for multilocation, dealer-distributed brands. Kohler utilizes the platform and online marketing assets to connect customers who visit Kohler's website to local, independent retailers who participate in a co-op marketing program.

Retailers have access to PowerChord's platform to respond to sales leads and view data about clicks, new leads, conversion numbers, and visits. Kohler has had a 200% increase in website sales and 53% increase in leads from the first of the year through the third quarter because of PowerChord, said Heather Houston, senior account manager at PowerChord.

The current consumer shift to more online shopping is fueling the need for brands to increase their online footprints with more digital marketing. PowerChord not only filters online leads from Kohler's website, but offers marketing and social advertising solutions for online searches and social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram) to also direct customers to local sources.

Tidewater subscribed to a full year of digital media advertising, which includes hyperlinking from Kohler's site to its local digital micro pages, social media ads, and Google search engine optimization. Tidewater has actually received twice as many leads as in the past with 42% more web visits, Houston said.

BECOMING A KOHLER PLATINUM DEALER

"It was actually our distributor (Nixon Power Services) who started talking to us about ways we could grow the business," Whitman said. "In talking, we ended up becoming a platinum dealer."

After selling enough Kohler products to become a platinum dealer, it opened up more cooperative advertising options for Tidewater, which allowed the company access to PowerChord and its marketing solutions.

Basically, once the PowerChord platform was set up, Tidewater initially picked zip codes to target two of its retail outlets and then eventually added all zip codes in its service areas. "If somebody goes online or they want information about a generator or quote, PowerChord will send us a lead," Whitman said. "We contact the lead, and it just goes from there. Sometimes someone just wants to know something, but the majority of people end up buying."

"It's been a huge success for us. We're excited and already making plans for next year, and are looking at ways we can continue our marketing efforts with PowerChord. They have a lot of online options and other things such as digital video ads. We're also considering some outdoor advertising in 2021."

Right now, online advertising has been the biggest sales success and because of its platinum dealer status, Tidewater has not had to invest many dollars for PowerChord's platform or advertising—Kohler pays a part, Nixon Power pays a part, and Tidewater pays a part.

For other propane companies looking to jump into or grow their propane generator sales, Whitman's advice is to pick partners who want to grow your business. "Find somebody that will support you like Nixon Power and Kohler have supported us. They've made it pleasant to work with them, and have helped us grow. They'll do anything they can when you ask them for advice." ■

PREVENTING OR RESOLVING CONSUMERS' TOP COMPLAINTS

STEVE RELYEA

When asked how they resolve complaints from customers, two propane marketers gave similar answers.

"I try to satisfy the customer," Steve Chase, president and CEO of FSi Oil and Propane (South Hadley, Mass.), told ***BPN***. "I will bend over backwards, and I think most companies will. But if I can't satisfy the customer, then we part as friends."

"I calm it down and actually have a discussion," Tyler McCormick, president of Collett Propane (Xenia, Ohio), answered. "I very rarely lose a customer on bad terms. If they do want to end the relationship, I try to end it on positive terms."

Both Collett Propane and FSi Oil and Propane have A+ rankings from the Better Business Bureau (BBB), are BBB accredited, and have won awards from their local BBBs. The propane industry as a whole offers a similar level of service. According to statistics recently released by the International Association of Better Business Bureaus, 95% of the complaints received by propane companies in the U.S. and Canada in 2019 were settled.

"I completely believe it," said Rich Goldberg, president of Warm Thoughts Communications (Clifton, N.J.), a marketing firm focused on propane, heating oil, and HVAC-related business. When asked by ***BPN*** about the high percentage of complaints settled, he replied, "Most propane companies are owned by good guys who care about customers and their reputation."

ISSUES, SOLUTIONS

BBB reports that consumers made 742 complaints against propane companies in the U.S. and Canada in 2019. That was down from 795 complaints the previous year. The organization shared with ***BPN*** the top four complaints made against companies in four propane-related industry classifications: propane, propane equipment, propane gas plumbing, and propane supplies. (Some complaints contained multiple issues at the same time, BBB notes.) Goldberg, McCormick, and Chase then shared their thoughts on how propane marketers can prevent or resolve complaints.

No. 1: Bad customer service. This tops the BBB's list, accounting for 44.6% of the complaints about propane companies in 2019 and 43.4% in the first nine months of 2020. BBB says this issue includes, for example, rude customer service or not being knowledgeable of the issue, policy, etc.

Solutions. Warm Thoughts has learned in focus groups with propane customers that "rude employees" is the top thing that would cause the customers to look for a new supplier. "Often the problems we see aren't because of bad people, but bad systems, which allow cracks to open, particularly if a customer issue requires multiple 'departments' to be involved—i.e., delivery, customer service, maybe sales," Goldberg said. He added, "Sometimes, companies just have the wrong people answering the phones. But often, they just don't arm them with the tools and training to impress customers and win fans."

No. 2: Hidden fee. This is the second most common complaint, at 29.3% in 2019 and 33.5% in the first nine months of 2020. The issue includes, for example, a tank rental fee.

Solutions. The key here is transparency, the propane marketers said. "What fees a company charges is completely up to them, but they should take time to explain them to the customers," McCormick explained. "It is best to be transparent up front and tell people from the get-go. It's not fair to the customer when they see it for the first time on a bill." Chase summed up the solution this way: "Fees shouldn't be in fine print. It should be clear what the fees are."

No. 3: Delivery. This is third on BBB's list of complaints, measured at 27.4% of the complaints in 2019 and 25.6% in the first nine months of 2020. Issues include, for example, delayed delivery or no delivery.

Solutions. A common issue here is will-call customers who think they can get a delivery on the day they call. "Sometimes people have unrealistic expectations; they say, 'If I call today, why can't you deliver it today?'" McCormick said. "We explain why we do what we do. We also explain why it is important they adhere to policies. They understand; they might not like

COMPLAINTS FOR PROPANE COMPANIES

Top issues*	2019	2020 (Jan.-Sept.)
Bad customer service (for example, rude customer service or not knowledgeable of the issue/policy etc. over the phone, in person)	44.6%	43.4%
Hidden fee (for example, rental fee)	29.3%	33.5%
Delivery (for example, delivery delayed, no delivery)	27.4%	25.6%
Price (high price, alleged price gouging, etc.)	16.4%	18.3%

*Note that some complaints contained multiple issues at the same time.

Source: International Association of Better Business Bureaus Inc.

U.S. & CANADA BBB 2019 STATISTICS

Industry Classification	Inquiries	Rank	Complaints	Rank	Complaints Settled	%
Propane	66,751	466	742	215	706	95%
Propane Equipment	133	5,073	2	3,571	2	100%
Propane Gas Plumbing	1,053	3,615	5	2,975	3	60%
Propane Supplies	23,350	1,026	211	529	198	94%

Source: International Association of Better Business Bureaus Inc.

it, but they understand." Chase said his company has specific days on which it delivers to will-call customers in remote areas. It will not change routes if a will-call customer wants a delivery tomorrow. "Even then, if they are out, we try to get there," he added. "We have to assume it might be a leak, so we fill the tank and do a pressure test and safety check." If the customer is not out, the customer service representative (CSR) explains the cost for will-call delivery. Then, Chase says, the customer often replies, "Oh, that's OK, I'm fine."

No. 4: Price. This is the fourth most common complaint, accounting for 16.4% of the complaints in 2019 and 18.3% in January through September 2020. Issues include, for example, high price and alleged price gouging.

Solutions. A likely cause of this is fluctuations in the price of propane. "Price gouging complaints are usually associated with times when wholesale prices are surging, and propane marketers are just trying to keep up," Goldberg said. "It's not the company, it's the market. But propane companies don't do themselves any favors, because they don't explain it to people well enough, either through their customer service people or via written communication. Erring on the side of over-communication works wonders in mitigating customer service complaints." McCormick noted that some customers buy gas only twice a year, so the price difference between deliveries might be large. "CSRs must be trained to explain why the price might be higher than it was during the summer," he said. "They should also sell our seasonal and contract buying options." Chase, too, noted that pricing varies. "I have a one-price policy," he said. "It's a set price and everyone knows what they pay. If they use a certain amount, they get a discount."

BEST PRACTICES

As well as suggesting solutions to the four most common complaints, the propane industry experts shared some best practices having to do with customer service.

Take it offline. If an unhappy customer posts a bad review online, don't argue, Goldberg suggested. "It is much better to post something like, 'We're so sorry to hear that you felt like you were not treated fairly. We're going to reach out to you directly about this,' or something to that effect," he said. "Get it out of the public domain, and then work to either solve it or reduce the heat. Often, if you can work something out, you can ask the customer to go back and update or delete their original complaint."

Listen to staff. "I keep an ear to the ground with the people who deal with our customers, including CSRs, drivers, and technicians," McCormick said. "I don't talk with customers every day like they do, so I listen to them about what they're hearing." Chase, too, keeps in touch and asks about complaints. "I want to know about it—what the complaint was, whether it was resolved, and, if not, why."

Train. "We listen to CSRs, take what they're hearing, and give them knowledge of how we would like them to answer," McCormick said. "That way, they are comfortable answering." Chase, who recently completed a term as chairman of the Propane Gas Association of New England (PGANE), said he makes use of the training available from that association and from the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC). He has also had customer service trainers from Warm Thoughts do CSR training at FSi Oil and Propane. "Training is paramount to your success," Chase said. "We want all our customers to have a good experience, and we want the same story told by every CSR, technician, and driver, so we spend a lot of time and money on training."

Participate. In addition to participating in propane associations, the marketers are members of their local BBBs. Chase, in fact, sits on the board of directors of the BBB serving his area. "I have been on the board since 2005," he said. "I get involved because I want to see what goes on, what the complaints are, and what BBB does. They are pro-consumer, but also defensive of business. They just want you to try to satisfy the customer." Collett Propane is a member of two BBBs that serve the areas in which it has offices. "We try to stay in the mix with them," McCormick said. "It's important to take a worldwide view of customer service."

De-escalate. Warm Thoughts provides training for propane companies who are trying to improve their customer experience and increase sales. To help them de-escalate any conflicts with customers, the firm teaches a technique called Listen, Empathize, Solve, Smile (LESS is More!). "Customers want to be heard and they want their frustrated feelings validated," Goldberg said. "If you jump into a solution before hearing them out and letting them know you feel their pain, they are much more likely to push back and escalate. Saying, 'I'm so sorry you are frustrated; I would be frustrated too,' is not the same thing as saying, 'We messed up.' Only after you handle that part should you move to proposing a solution that could work for both parties. A great question to ask is, 'What do you think would be a fair solution?' Sometimes they want much less than you were prepared to offer. If they ask for too much, you can always say,

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INCREASING USES AND USERS AMID "ELECTRIFY EVERYTHING" CHALLENGE

PAT THORNTON

Regardless of whether the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) meets virtually or in person, the 800-pound gorilla known as the "electrify everything movement" does not sit unnoticed for long. Once again, PERC met virtually on Nov. 10 due to the coronavirus to review and continue progress on the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, which includes:

- Increase Propane's Voice in the National Energy Conversation;
- Grow the Autogas Market Through Industry Adoption;
- Create Market Growth Opportunities; and
- Develop Skilled Workforce and Trade Allies Through Safety and Technical Training

A top item on the agenda was a report from the Environmental Task Force, which has two representatives from PERC and two from the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA), to discuss messaging strategy to challenge electricity.

"The 'electrify everything movement' has had great momentum over the past two years, but we don't intend to roll over," said Stuart Weidie, president and CEO of Blossman Gas, who spoke on behalf of the Environmental Task Force. "We are working carefully on our messaging." He noted that words like "decarbonization" and "defossilization" are not going to be used in the messaging. "We will focus on two key themes, 'equity' and 'environment.'"

"Fair and equitable access to energy is a basic right," Weidie continued. "Affordability and reliability should never be exclusive. Electricity mandates assume electricity is 100% reliable and affordable to everyone." He noted that power outages are increasing in both number and cost and that the share of cost low-income households spend on electricity has risen by one-third in the last decade. "The 'today cost' of shifting the U.S. power grid to 100% renewable energy over the next 10 years is an estimated $4.5 trillion."

Weidie described aiming for "good" versus "perfect" with a "near zero" clean energy plan as the best approach for achieving 2050 clean climate goals faster. "It is the fairest and fastest approach. Electrification is the narrowest path to a low carbon future." Weidie said. "The science is conclusive: 'Large emissions reductions are achievable through a broad range of opportunities, including substitution of traditional fossil-fuel-based industrial feedstocks with low- or zero-carbon alternatives.'" He noted "near zero" is working today with a 17% renewable grid. In 2019, the U.S. had the most significant CO_2 reduction in the world on a country basis.

"More than 60% of energy used for electricity generation is lost in conversion. In 2019, U.S. utility-scale facilities consumed 38 quadrillion BTUs of energy to provide 14 quads of electricity," Weidie said. He noted that 100% renewable energy does not mean 100% carbon-free energy.

It was discussed that the World LPG Association has not established a



STUART WEIDIE



TUCKER PERKINS



ERIN HATCHER

theme to promote propane versus electricity worldwide and that some European countries see 100% renewable propane as a possibility. Such a goal may not be as likely in the U.S. "Conventional propane still meets the standards of the Paris Accords. We have no issue discussing how propane meets the needs of the Paris Accords," said Tucker Perkins, PERC president and CEO.

"Smaller industries like ours are taking the lead right now on establishing 'gas versus electricity' messaging. We need to take the conversations to decision makers using their language. January 31 is a target date to have the propane messaging versus electricity refined for consumers, marketers, and thought leaders."

During his chief executive officer's report, Perkins remarked that COVID has changed the industry dramatically. "The pandemic has given us a chance to go back and rethink priorities." Perkins noted that he has also made it a priority to speak to various groups outside the propane industry including the National Truck Equipment Association and "Meeting of the Minds," which brings global leaders together for urban planning. "Why did they have a propane speaker?" Perkins asked. "They know all of the energy rhetoric out there is not realistic. We offer real-world solutions they can afford. These are easy discussions once we get our foot in the door."

Perkins also pointed out that he has been engaging with writers for several national and world publications to insert propane into the national energy conversation. He discussed going through the process of convincing a writer for *Forbes* magazine of the many ways propane fits into the future. "The first reaction of Ken Silverstein with *Forbes* when I asked him his thoughts on the future of propane was that he hadn't given it much thought. He just said propane was the fuel he uses with his grill. We've made progress since that initial discussion," Perkins said. "We're barely in the top of the second inning on getting into the national energy conversation."

While writers and reporters may have fresh eyes when it comes to propane, new key staff members at PERC who come from different industries also must take time to become oriented to the propane industry. This is the case with Erin Hatcher, senior vice president, communications and marketing, who joined the PERC staff in August. Hatcher reported at the PERC meeting on her onboarding process and her observations so far. She has met with many marketers, fellow PERC staff members, advisory committee members, state executives, original equipment manufacturers, NPGA staff members, and other agency personnel.

Her initial observations regarding the organization are that people and partners are collaborative, professional, and proficient with deep knowledge of the industry; there are ample resources available to achieve objectives; safety and training provided by PERC is prolific and of outstanding quality; and there is an opportunity to streamline PERC-agency communication, ensure requests adhere to strategy, and manage total expenses.

Initial observations regarding the industry are that marketers have a wide range of support needs; longevity across all partners provides deep knowledge of industry and understanding of challenges; collaboration among marketers, state associations, PERC, and NPGA appears well-established; innovation pipeline appears robust and able to sustain the industry; attributes of propane are highly compelling in COVID-19/social distancing environment; and environmental benefits of propane and complementary energy role are powerful messages that can be further amplified.

Hatcher will continue reviewing annual plans, conducting a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, evaluating tactics, and reviewing growth opportunities. She will have a communications and budget plan to present in February 2021.

A budget for PERC for 2021 was approved including:

- Total assessments: $41.95 million
- Total state rebates: $8.39 million
- Total program expenses: $35,450,024
- Increase/decrease in net assets: ($650,000)

These dockets were approved at the meeting:

Business Development:

- Docket 22712: Emerging Technologies Research Investment, $1 million
- Docket 22665: Micro-Combined Cooling, Heat & Power, $700,000
- Docket 22570: BRASH MICRO-CHP Project Demonstration, $64,000
- Docket 22560: EPA Propane Certification for Aisin 1.5kW CHP System, $60,000
- Docket 22618: Ford 7.3L V8 LPG Industrial Engine, $104,160
- Docket 22623: Ford 3.5L V6 on LPG, $173,723
- Docket 22726: Propane Carbon Emissions Reduction Program for Builders, $1.25 million

Market Research:

- Docket 22750: 2020 Sales Report, $145,500

Safety & Training:

- Docket 22721: Propane Emergencies Training and Certification Program, $580,000
- Docket 22718: CETP modularization Project phase 2, $1.3 million ■

INSURANCE

Continued from **Page 21**

court limits which are fairly small, while other states allow claims up to $10,000. A claim of $10,000 dollars is real money that a marketer will have to pay themselves if they lose, all because they were in a hurry.

If you're involved in an accident:

Never—"make a deal" for damages.

Never—leave the scene of even a *minor* accident.

Never—accept an offer of cash, check, or "private" settlement.

Never—disavow injury to you or your passengers.

Never—offer to pay *anything* even if you think you are at fault.

Never—administer first aid unless you are *licensed* to do so.

Always—(when conditions permit) move to shoulder or other "safe area" to prevent further damage.

Always—ask someone to summon police and seek medical assistance. Repeat at five-minute intervals.

Always—remember the 3 C's : Remain *calm*, *courteous*, *consistent* in your version of the accident.

Always—obtain complete information from those involved.

Always—complete the claims report on the scene—not later

Always—obtain the names of witnesses including addresses and phone numbers.

Always—notify the owner of the vehicle you are driving as soon as possible.

Think how you can keep your place safe during these uncertain times, because there is someone out there that is thinking up ways to untie it, unlock it, find the keys, and light it up in the dark.

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.

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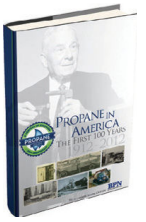
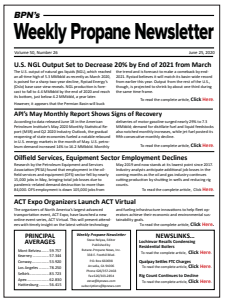


The first century of the propane industry is chronicled in "Propane in America: The First 100 Years 1912-2012."



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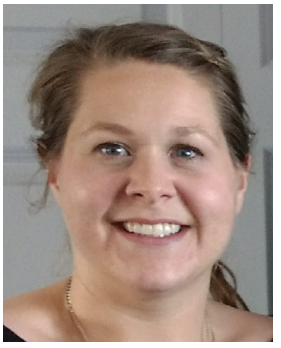
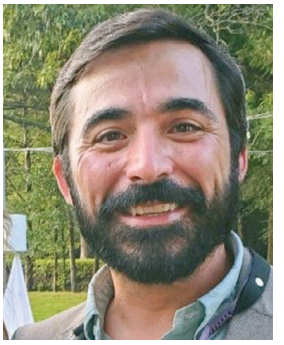
RANDY WHITE
Teeco Products Inc.



MARY RACHEL KEYSER
Virtual Propane Expo



VINCENT DELAHOUSSAYE
Quality Steel



CHARLIE ERMER
Palmer Gas & Oil

Teeco Products Inc. (Irvine, Calif.) has named **Randy White** as its new regional operations manager for its Auburn, Wash., location. White has been in the propane industry since 1998. He joined Teeco in August.

Blue Cow Software (Lynnfield, Mass.) recently made some changes to its leadership team. Blue Cow Software president, **Mark Nardone**, is transitioning away from managing the day-to-day operations and moving into an advisory position with the company, allowing him to spend more time in a creative role while letting fresh leadership take the company into the next decade. Nardone will be succeeded by **Nick Quaratiello**, newly named senior vice president of Blue Cow. He has been with Blue Cow Software since its inception, and plans to stay true to what the company's product means to its customers. Quaratiello has strong relationships with employees and customers. Nardone will still be connected and actively advising the team.

Other recent staff changes include **Dan Rowe** leading payments, **Todd Kipperman** managing software sales, **Gary Choy** overseeing software development, **Otman Agzenay** leading the implementation team, **Shawn Tourigny** heading product development, and **Jeff Price** continuing his oversight of customer support. All areas will report to Quaratiello in his new role.

Virtual Propane Expo (VPE) has named **Mary Rachel Keyser** to assist with its project development and industry outreach of *virtualpropane-expo.com.* She will work with VPE founders to engage presenters and interviews for coming VPE sessions. In addition, Keyser will work on a number of VPE projects, including its e-commerce solution for propane industry companies as well as the recently launched VPE Propane Education & Training series.

She has extensive experience in the fueloil and propane business, having started her career working at National Oilheat Research Alliance and most recently working as the customer service manager for a multi-fuel multi-state marketer based in the Northeast.

Vincent Delahoussaye has joined the **Quality Steel** (Cleveland, Miss.) sales team as regional sales manager for the Midwest territory. He will be taking over the territory previously managed by **Mike Rentmeester**, who is transitioning into another territory. Delahoussaye will be responsible for Quality Steel propane and NH_3 tank sales in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas. He was previously a regional sales manager for Cives Steel Co., and has worked in steel fabrication for more than 20 years.



MARY RUTH BROOKS
Brooks Gas

Mary Ruth Brooks of Marshfield, Mo., passed away on Oct. 24. She was 91. From 1964 to 2015, she worked at **Brooks Gas** as office manager, keeping track of all phases of bookkeeping and office employees. Her sons, John and Joe Brooks, manage two Brooks Gas operations, while other family members are also managers in the company.

She was well-known and very involved in her community. Her admiration for education helped get the funding for Dolly Parton Imagination Library, a program for early child reading development. Among the many awards she received in her life were the Outstanding Missourian Award in 2005 from the Missouri State Senate, the Marshfield Business Person of the Year Award in 1993 from the Marshfield Chamber of Commerce, and the 2012 Marshfield Area Community Foundation Pinnacle Award.

Charlie Ermer, vice president of business operations for **Palmer Gas & Oil** (PGO; Atkinson, N.H.), was recently awarded a 2020 Business Excellence Award from *NH Business Review* in the category of consumer services for large organizations. The annual awards recognize New Hampshire's top business executives for their imagination, industriousness, innovation, and achievements. *NH Business Review* launched the Business Excellence Awards in 2002.

"Charlie's vision and planning allowed

for Palmer Gas & Oil to continue seamless operations during some of the most unprecedented times of COVID-19," said Peter Iacobucci, general manager of Palmer Gas & Oil. "Thanks to Charlie's foresight, we were prepared for one of the greatest challenges in our company's history." PGO is a family-owned and -operated propane and oil delivery and service company based in Atkinson, N.H., with an over-85-year history serving New Hampshire, Northern Massachusetts, and Southern Maine.



Suburban Propane Partners (Whippany, N.J.) recently announced that **Jason Trotter**, an operations manager at Suburban Propane's Philadelphia/Telford, Pa., location, is its 2020 SuburbanCares Award Winner. Trotter, who also serves as a volunteer firefighter, helped save two lives in January when he responded to a severe, single-vehicle accident, where he found two high school-aged-girls trapped in a car. The driver was in serious condition and the passenger was critical. Due in part to Trotter's heroic efforts on scene, she survived and is doing well now. Established in 2018, the SuburbanCares Award honors an individual member of Team Suburban Propane who has made a significant impact on one or more individuals, a community, or a charitable organization, whether through ongoing dedicated community service and volunteerism, an act of heroism, compassion for a customer, a fellow employee, or any other effort demonstrating care for the well-being of others.





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RE MICHEL LAUNCHES MOBILE WAREHOUSE CONCEPT VEHICLE

RE Michel Co. has launched a mobile warehouse to service propane companies in Arizona. The concept involves driving a mobile warehouse to the customer in order to display and demonstrate the newest industry products, and then sell them on the spot. "I think the propane industry is ready for some new and innovative approaches to equipment distribution" said Ray Kazakewich, national sales manager. He added, "We pack our equipment warehouse into a truck, and drive it to the customer and can meet them at the office or even at a jobsite. We then offer technical advice and training to complement the equipment, and do it all on the spot at no charge. There is no waiting two or three days for UPS, there is no phone call to make where you speak to some distributor rep from 1000 miles away. We will even print their invoice on the spot." RE Michel offers propane equipment at 105 warehouse locations from coast to coast; this is its first mobile warehouse. It is based out of the company's existing Gilbert, Ariz., facility. *remichel.com/dealerslp.com*





PROPANE ENGINE. PSI's new 8.8-liter ultra-low-NO_x propane engine has received certification by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and California Air Resources Board (CARB). Produced in collaboration with Navistar's IC Bus brand, the engine is certified to a NO_x emission standard of 0.02 grams per brake horsepower (g/bhp-hr), making it one of the cleanest propane engines available on the transportation market. The 8.8-liter engine is certified beyond EPA's strictest emission standards and also exceeds CARB's optional low-NO_x standard for heavy-duty engines. In addition, its CO_2 emission rate is 10% better than that of current competitive propane engines. The new engine offers 270 hp with 565 lb-ft of torque, comparable to PSI's existing propane engines. PSI will continue to offer its conventional 8.8-liter propane engine and the new ultra-low-NO_x version. The ultra-low-NO_x engine will power IC school buses. Production is anticipated early next year. School bus fleets making the switch from diesel to propane engines are eligible to receive federal, state, and private grants. *psiengines.com*

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INDUSTRY CALENDAR

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

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. 11-12—Energy Utility Environment Conference, Live and Virtual. *info@enec.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/*

March 30-April 1—POWERGEN International, Orlando, Fla. (888) 299-8016; *powergen.com*

April 11-14—GPA Midstream Convention San Antonio, San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter, San Antonio, Texas. (918) 493-3872; *gpamidstreamconveition.org*

May 24-26—Eastern Energy Expo 2021, Virtual Event. *EasternEnergyExpo.com*

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

June 23-26—Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Expo, Kentucky Exposition Center, Louisville, Ky. *hpbexpo.com*

July 1-3—Oil & Gas Africa, Sarit Expo Center, Nairobi, Kenya. *expogr.com/kenya oil/*

July 15-16—National Propane Gas Association Benchmarking Council Meeting, Renaissance Hotel, Stapleton, Denver. *info@npga.org; npga.org/organization/npga-events/*

July 21-23—Michigan Propane Gas Association Summer Convention, Great Wolf Lodge, Traverse City. (517) 487-2021

Aug. 11-12—Northeast Propane Show, DCU Center, Worcester, Mass. *leslie@pgane.org; northeastpropaneshow.com*

Aug. 23-26—North Central Propane Convention, La Crosse Center, La Crosse, Wis. (515) 564-1260

Sept. 8-10—M Pact Show, location tba, Indianapolis. (859) 219-3515; *m-pact.org/faqs/*

Sept. 12-14—2021 Fall TS&S Committee Meeting, The Antlers, Colorado Springs, Colo. *bswiecicki@npga.org; npga.org/organization/npga-events/*

Sept. 13-16—Gastech Exhibition & Conference, Singapore EXPO, Singapore. *customerservices@gastechevent.com; gastechevent.com*

Oct. 18-20—2021 NPGA Southeastern Convention & International Propane Expo, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta. *registration@npga.org*

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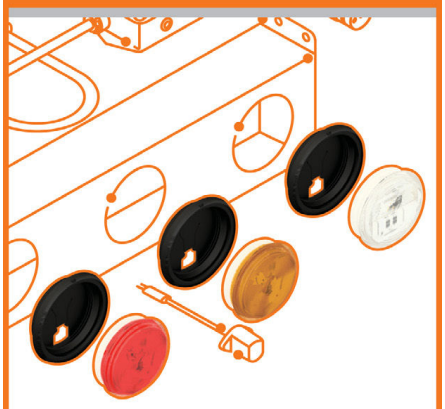

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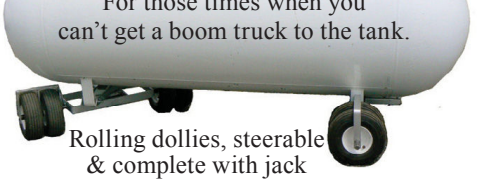

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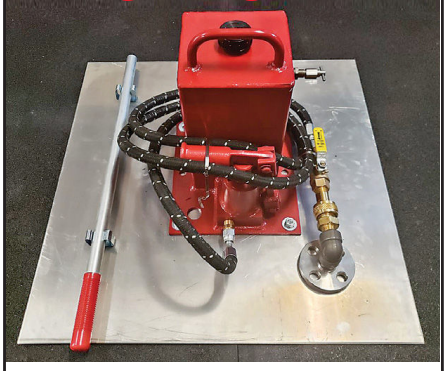

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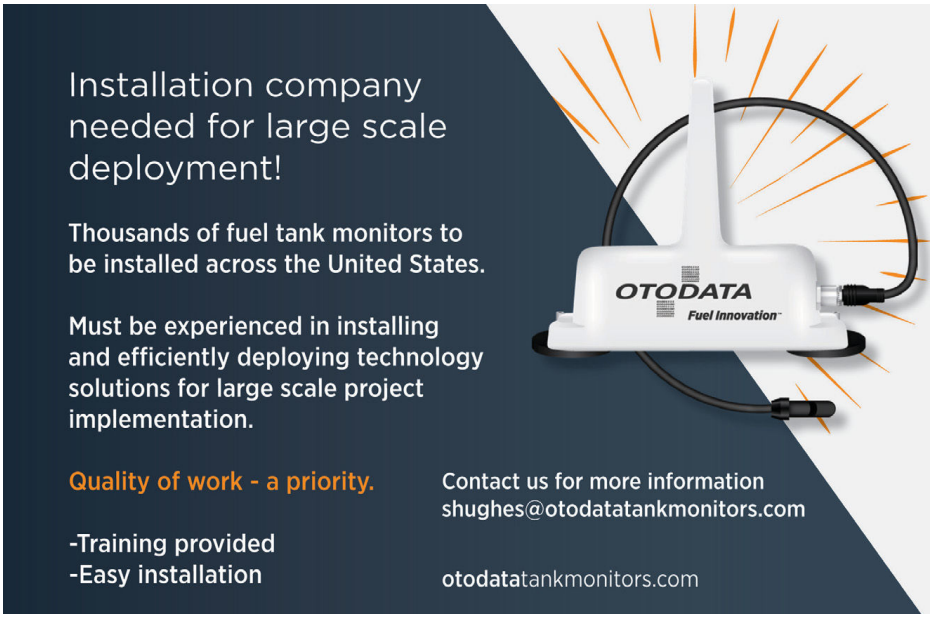

BBB

Continued from **Page 38**

'You know, we can't really do *x*, but what if we did *y*?' The Smile part is what you maintain throughout the conversation and how you end it."

The three experts concluded with three general policies that have helped them maintain their high BBB ratings and that can help the industry keep up its high rate of settling complaints.

"The biggest thing is, if a customer has a problem, take time to understand what the issue is," McCormick said. "If we've made a mistake, we fix it. If the issue is a policy we have in place, we explain it to them. We find we can resolve 99% of the issues."

"Customers want to do business with people they like, who they think care about them," Goldberg said. "That isn't just about the owners, it's about the whole organization."

"The No. 1 thing is, stand behind your business," Chase concluded. "Be upfront with customers and then live up to what you told them." ■

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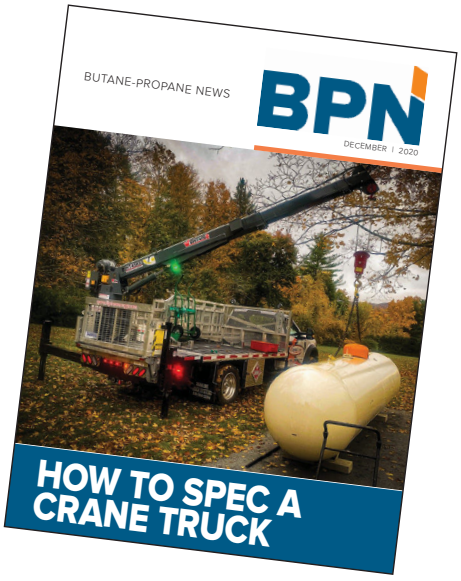

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ENERGY INDUSTRY CAREER HAS COME FULL CIRCLE

KAREN MASSMAN VanASDALE

It would have been a natural for Jennifer Goldbach, vice president of business development for Rhoads Energy in Lancaster, Pa., to have a lifelong career in the energy industry, but hers was not a straight path.

Her grandfather was hired as a teenager by Jerome Rhoads to do whatever was needed for his farms, restaurant, and gas company he founded in 1917. Her father's entire career was spent at Rhoads Energy, where he eventually became president and CEO. Pumping gas and hauling fuel lines fill her childhood memories along with working at Rhoads' restaurant, which her mother managed.

But Goldbach had different ambitions. "I knew I didn't want a career in the business. My dad was the nicest person you'd know. He would never tell me if I ever did anything wrong, so I knew I could never work for him."

After graduating from Dickinson College with a bachelor's degree in computer science, she entered the management program at Fulton Bank. "Folks saw me as leader."

At age 24 and newly married (she met her husband, Tom, during management training at the bank), Goldbach became manager of the mortgage department. Traditionally, the position had been held by a man.

After building up the bank's mortgage department, she left to lead the residential mortgage department and all retail lending for Sterling Financial, which included the First National Bank of North East (Maryland). She commuted two days a week and began immersing herself in the community. She soon became the bank's first female president and CEO.

Goldbach is a trailblazer and mentor for many women in management, never questioning her ability to lead. "The only glass ceiling is the one you build," she said. "You have to have faith in yourself and believe in yourself. I'm not a bra-burning feminist. I just do it and quietly get it done."

Wanting to be closer to home when her son was in high school, Goldbach led the business development efforts for Benchmark Construction, a regional commercial construction company. "Again, I was the only woman at the board table," Goldbach said, explaining part of her role was to help change the predominately male culture.



When her brother, Michael DeBerdine, the CEO and president of Rhoads Energy (with Goldbach below), approached her about joining the company, its propane division was only a year old, and someone was needed to quickly help it grow.

Rhoads Energy has grown organically and by acquisitions to become a family of energy companies. It is now one of the leading providers of energy services related to heating oil, natural gas, propane, HVAC, and fleet fueling in Southeastern and Central Pennsylvania.

"I immediately bought steel-toed boots and a Carhartt jacket and helped deliver propane for a couple weeks," Goldbach said. She immersed herself in propane, quickly becoming involved in the Pennsylvania Propane Gas Association, where she recently completed a board term.

One of her biggest accomplishments since has been spearheading the company's autogas effort partnering with ROUSH CleanTech and local school districts to convert school buses to become propane-powered. To date, Rhoads Energy has helped schools transition more than 500 school buses to propane.

"It's slow but steady. Almost every year, we've helped some school district make the transition," she said. A fervent advocate for autogas, Goldbach spends time educating school districts and others in the industry about the fuel.

Another large part of Goldbach's personal and professional passion is community engagement; she has held leadership roles for various organizations. "I strive to make a difference every day to someone," Jennifer said. This has become her life mantra. It is inspired by the *Story of the Starfish* about a boy trying to save all the washed up starfish by throwing them back in the ocean one at a time, thus making a difference for at least one starfish.

During her off hours, she primarily spends time with her husband and son. "I've just been blessed. I've been blessed with wonderful professional opportunities," she said. "My husband is a great man and wonderful role model to our son. My cup is always half full."

Her advice to others: "Own your own life. Don't let anyone tell you you can't." ■

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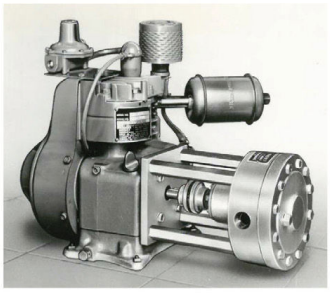
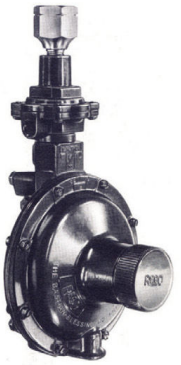

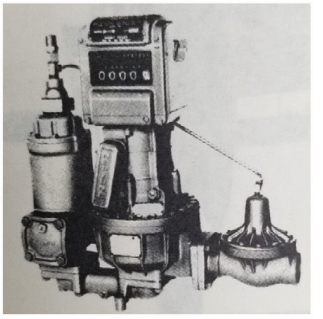

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