BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

BPN

AUGUST 21



THE SUPPLY ISSUE

Industry experts detail what to expect with propane production & demand moving into winter 2021-2022

SPECIAL SECTION: WOMEN IN PROPANE

How to Market Your Company to Consumers Post-Pandemic

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Dear Readers,

Assess and adapt. These two buzzwords were part of many business owners' strategies in the last year and a half. And if there's anything the pandemic has taught us, it's how resilient we can be when faced with challenges in both our professional and personal lives.

As we move into winter 2021-2022, we're faced with new obstacles — this time in relation to propane supply. Currently, propane prices are higher than they have been in quite some time, while inventories are at some of the lowest points recorded in years. This stark contrast is caused by a number of factors, but one of the biggest is the shift in demand from the height of the pandemic to now, when many people are getting vaccinated and returning to some sort of normalcy.

On page 22, Crestwood LP's John Powell details this and more in our feature section on propane supply. Regardless of what's on the horizon for the industry in the upcoming winter, you can take strides now to prepare for it — look to Powell's article, where he gives you 13 key steps for establishing a solid and secure supply plan for your business.

On page 26, Contributing Editor Pat Thornton talks to four industry analysts who discuss where the market is headed, a few factors to consider in addition to inventory and days of supply, and several resources you can take advantage of to help you navigate what's to come.

The industry and its output are nothing without the people who work in it day in and day out. On page 34, we've featured the National Propane Gas Association's Women in Propane Council, which is working to improve workforce engagement and diversity and inclusion — among many other things — at both a national and state level. Make sure you check out a special profile on Propane Gas Association of New England's Leslie Anderson, who's been instrumental in doing both as part of the council and in her own state association.

As you're receiving this issue, the BPN team is on its way to Reno, Nevada, to attend the 2021 Western Propane Trade Show and Convention. If you're also in town for the event, please stop by our booth and say hello. We're looking forward to talking with you at the show!

Thanks for reading,



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BPN
BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

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August 2021



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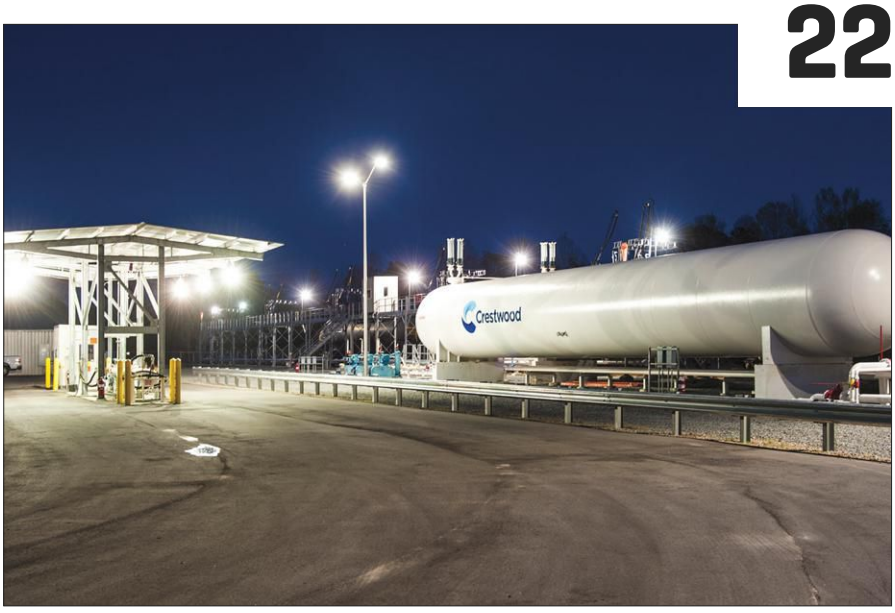

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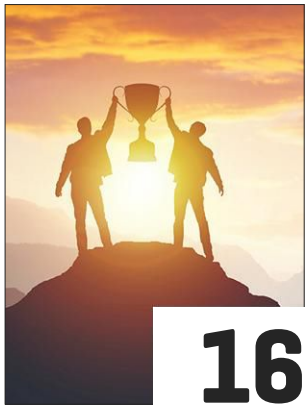

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NPGA's Women in Propane Council takes industry D&I to a state level

After a lifelong career in the energy industry, Leslie Anderson is no longer the only female at the table

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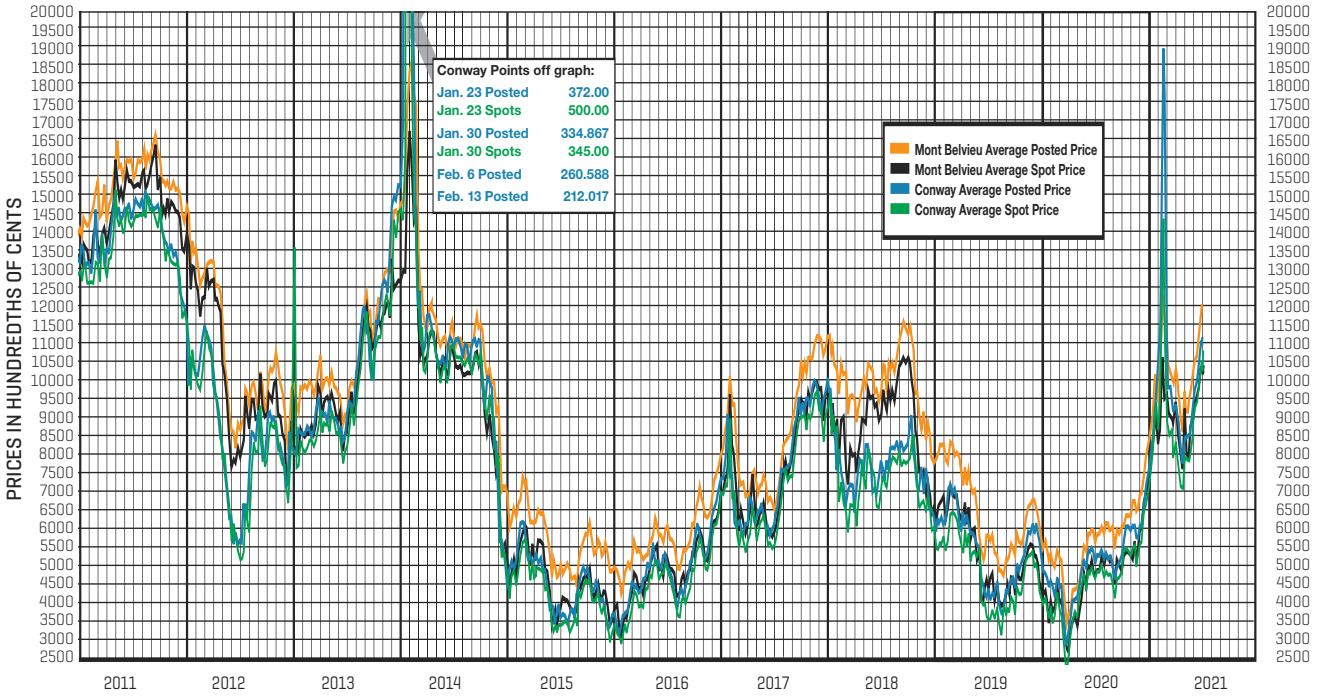


MONT BELVIEU & CONWAY AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES

MID-WEEK AVERAGE POSTED/SPOT PROPANE PRICES

(Cents per Gallon)

Date	Mont Belvieu		Conway	
	POSTED	SPOT	POSTED	SPOT
6-17-21	106.506	95.250 – 95.625	100.097	94.000 – 94.750
6-24-21	112.506	102.500 – 102.750	105.597	101.750 – 102.250
7-1-21	119.506	109.000 – 110.375	113.597	107.750 – 109.000
7- 8-21	120.506	105.000 – 106.250	112.397	103.750 – 105.000
7-15-21	121.756	109.500 – 110.750	113.097	108.000 – 109.250

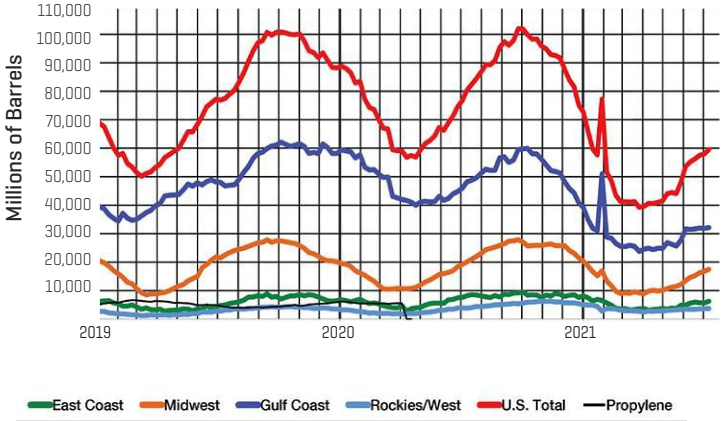
KEY PRINCIPAL AVERAGES 2011-2021

Cents/Gallon Principal Averages

	7/ 7/11	7/ 7/16	7/2/19	7/2/20	7/1/21
Mont Belvieu	156.563	57.188	58.007	56.007	119.506
Kearney	147.677	52.240	46.847	53.942	116.676
Conway	145.705	49.055	43.730	50.570	113.597
Los Angeles	150.333	62.000	83.500	78.250	121.667
Selkirk	165.100	65.053	80.968	80.542	146.018
Apex	159.530	59.011	59.173	60.936	116.841
Hattiesburg	156.195	54.220	54.615	54.603	109.821

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

June 11, 2021 to July 9, 2021



U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

June 11 to July 9, 2021 and One Year Ago

(Thousand Barrels)

	7/9/21	7/2/21	6/25/21	6/18/21	6/11/21	7/10/20
East Coast	6.282	5.652	5.741	5.893	5.620	8.239
Midwest	17.459	16.740	16.216	15.290	14.655	20.088
Gulf Coast	32.134	31.870	31.982	31.620	31.448	48.179
Rocky Mtn & West Coast	3.688	3.709	3.541	3.437	3.471	3.841
U.S. Total	59.563	57.971	57.479	56.240	55.194	80.348

*Canadian inventories data will return in BPN's September 2021 issue.

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PROPANE education & research COUNCIL

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PERC LAUNCHES NATIONAL BRAND FOR PROPANE

The Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) has launched a new identity for propane that signals a change in how to view this reliable energy source. The brand, PROPANE Energy for Everyone, highlights propane's role in ensuring energy equity and reducing emissions. "Americans are beginning to appreciate the value of propane in a wider energy mix after seeing the vulnerabilities of the electric grid in Texas and California and around the country," said PERC president and CEO Tucker Perkins. "Propane is clean, affordable and available right now. Unlike the electric grid, it does not require trillions of dollars in infrastructure investment that will create a burden on those who can least afford it. Propane offers solutions for climate, health and equity."

OBERON FUELS NAMES VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT



Cinch Munson

Oberon Fuels announced that propane industry executive and advocate Cinch Munson has joined the team as vice president of commercial development. The appointment comes as Oberon has begun commercial production of renewable dimethyl ether (rDME) and is expanding market development. "Oberon Fuels is expanding on multiple fronts right now — from driving sales of rDME as a blending agent for propane users to unlocking the pathway for renewable hydrogen, and Cinch will be at the center of it all," said Rebecca Boudreaux, Ph.D., CEO of Oberon Fuels. Munson has more than 20 years in the propane and agribusiness sectors. Most recently, he served as senior vice president, business development, for PERC. During his tenure, he led the propane industry's growth efforts by leading business development on behalf of the United States propane industry through partnerships, market development, product development and product commercialization.

THOMPSONGAS NAMES AREA DIRECTOR FOR CAROLINAS REGION



Sean Daugherty

ThompsonGas announced it has named Sean Daugherty area director of the Carolinas region. Daugherty will oversee all the branches and operations in his region. "We are very excited to have Sean leading our Carolinas area. Sean has consistently delivered outstanding results throughout his career and is highly regarded throughout the propane industry," said Jim Davis, chief operating officer. Daugherty has worked in the propane business for 29 years and started as a district manager for ThermoGas in 1992. He has since managed propane operations in 20 states and previously served as president of the Tennessee Propane Gas Association.

SUPERIOR PLUS ANNOUNCES ACQUISITIONS OF KAMPS PROPANE & WILLIAMS ENERGY GROUP

Superior Plus Corp. has announced that one of its subsidiaries has entered into an agreement to acquire the equity interests of Kamps Propane Inc., High Country Propane Inc., Pick Up Propane Inc., Kiva Energy Inc., Competitive Capital Inc. and Propane Construction and Meter Services (collectively, "Kamps") for an aggregate purchase price of approximately U.S. $240 million (CDN $299 million) before adjustments for working capital. The acquisition is anticipated to close during the third quarter of 2021. Founded in 1969, Kamps is an independent, family-owned-and-operated retail and wholesale propane distributor based in California, servicing approximately 45,000 residential, commercial and wholesale customers. Kamps has 14 retail branch offices, five company-operated rail terminals, over 375 vehicles and approximately 280 employees. Superior Plus Corp. also announced it has acquired the assets of a retail propane distribution company based in North Carolina, Williams Energy Group. Founded in 1998, Williams Energy is an established independent retail propane distributor delivering approximately 7 million gallons of propane annually to 12,000 retail and commercial customers in North Carolina.

GROWMARK CEO ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT



Jim Spradlin

Jim Spradlin, Growmark's CEO since September 2014, announced to the Growmark board of directors his intent to retire effective Feb. 28, 2022. Growmark Chairman of the Board John Reifsteck said, "Jim has served the Growmark system with excellence since 1982. His leadership as CEO has been transformational, and he will leave a legacy of innovation in digital technology, leadership development, succession planning, and the establishment of an enterprise-wide strategy that is yielding increased customer satisfaction and financial success." Spradlin joined the FS/Growmark System as an accounting trainee at Schuyler-Brown FS. He has served in many roles over his career, including as the general manager of Piatt County Service Company and Ag-Land FS, positions on Growmark's regional staff, and as vice president for Growmark's agronomy and energy business units. The Growmark Board has initiated the search for Spradlin's replacement.

CETANE ASSOCIATES ANNOUNCES SALE OF MILLER'S GAS & OIL SERVICE'S PROPANE BUSINESS

Cetane Associates LLC announced that Koppy's Propane Inc., Pennsylvania, has acquired the propane assets related to Miller's Gas & Oil Service Inc., a full-service heating fuels delivery business located in central Pennsylvania. With its roots in Shamokin, Pennsylvania, since 1928, Miller's Gas & Oil grew from a gas station with weigh scales and a restaurant to a propane, distillates, and heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) business. The company is known for providing quality products and dependable service throughout Northumberland and surrounding counties. Owner Bill Miller is retaining the gas station, heating oil and related HVAC operations and assets of the business.

Industry Calendar

August 11-12 Northeast Propane Show
Worcester, Massachusetts
northeastpropaneshow.com

August 11-13 Western Propane Tradeshow and Convention
Reno, Nevada
westernpga.org

August 12-14 2021 Crossroads TPGA Propane Expo & Conference
Corpus Christi, Texas
txpropane.com

August 23-26 North Central Propane Convention
La Crosse, Wisconsin
iapropane.org/north-central-convention-trade-show

August 24 The Energy Summit
Denver, Colorado
coga.org/theenergysummit.html

August 24-26 New Jersey Propane Gas Association CETP Propane Delivery, Combined Delivery (2.2/2.4)
Freehold, New Jersey
njpga.org

September 8-10 Gastech Exhibition & Conference
Singapore
customerservices@gastechevent.com

September 12-14 NPGA 2021 Fall TS&S Committee Meeting
Colorado Springs, Colorado
npga.org/event/2021-fall-tss-committee-meeting/

September 21-23 Global Petroleum Show 2021
Calgary, Canada
globalenergyshow.com

September 21-23 Society of Petroleum Engineers Annual Technical Conference & Exhibition
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
atce.org/welcome

September 26-29 GPA Midstream Convention
San Antonio, Texas
gpamidstreamconvention.org

For additional calendar items, visit bpnews.com.

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Nancy Coop is an industry advocate. She serves as marketing director at Cetane Associates. Contact her at ncoop@cetane.net. Visit cetane.net.



WHAT MAKES YOU LOSE TRACK OF TIME?

Young Gassers reflect on the value of time in their daily lives

Like many of you, I've recently been attending webinars on rebranding propane. The first thing to know is who our target audience is when we talk about fuel.

Presenters tell us the answer is millennials and Generation Z — those who will be or are homeowners of the future. The second thing to learn is that this mighty group of people, ages 18 to 40 years old, have different concerns than those of earlier generations.

Our responders this month are members of the newly-named Young Gassers organization's 30 Under 30 class of 2021. As you read their responses, perhaps you'll notice a difference in their sense of what time is to them.

Where do they place the value of time in their lives? And when do they lose track of time?

In this column, adopted from the familiar "Heard on the Street" format, we offer our responders a chance to answer the question posed in the title. These are their replies reported verbatim.

TEMPUS FUGIT

The person who coined the idiom, "Time flies when you're having fun," surely has never been through an audit. We recently went through an extensive Department of Transportation audit; needless to say, it was stressful, but it also was quite the learning experience for us. Luckily, we passed with flying colors. However, being fully engaged in making sure our ducks were in a row surely made time fly!

TREVOR WENDT
WENDT'S PROPANE AND OIL
SANBORN, NEW YORK

There are a couple of activities that come to mind that make me lose track of time. The first is being involved in conversations about topics I am interested in with people I look up to; time seems to move very fast for me in these situations. I also lose track of time if I am working on a project that is intriguing or I am passionate about. This is another one where I look up at the clock and realize half of the day is already over, although it feels like I just sat down.

AUSTIN DAVIDSON
UNITED PACIFIC ENERGY
RENO, NEVADA

I lose track of time when I am working with my team — planning our sales strategies, discussing customer feedback, reviewing wins and losses, or just helping out in the warehouse.

It's easy to feel like I'm just pushing through a pile of work on my own sometimes, but when we really engage and work together, we get a lot done and usually have fun while we're at it. Anything that gets a conversation going makes the time fly by and forms real relationships that really make the workday enjoyable.

DARYL PATJAS
MAXQUIP INC.
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

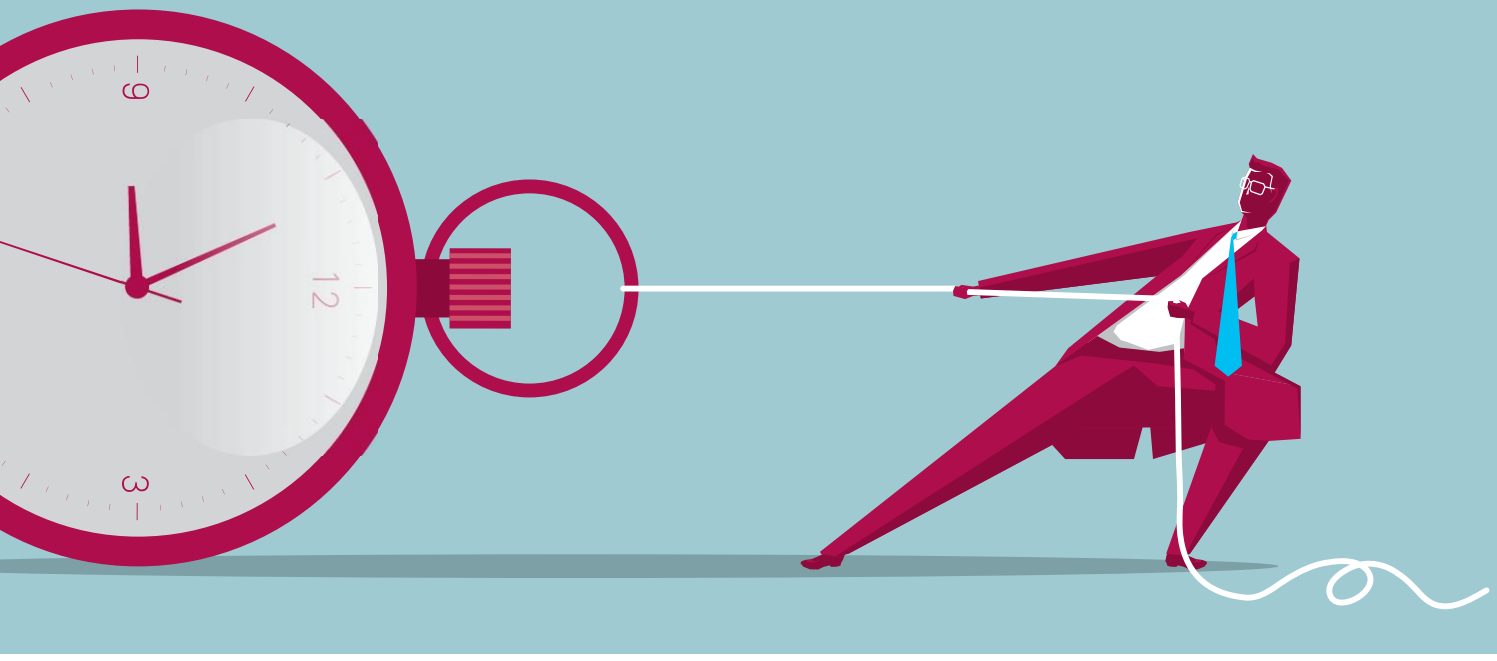
Fully engaging in the task at hand. Whether it be something exciting or something mundane and dull, full engagement blocks out any distractions or interruptions. With these distractions, time becomes frivolous and irrelevant.

NATE DEPRINZIO
TOTAL COMFORT GAS
ORMOND BEACH, FLORIDA

If something comes up that wasn't exactly on the schedule for that day, such as an emergency situation where my attention is solely on resolving it, it can make me lose track of time.

GARRETT SALMON
S&S GAS SERVICE INC.
SUMMERVILLE, GEORGIA

You know the old saying, "Time flies when you're having fun?" Well, it's true. Enjoying what I do makes me lose track of time. There is always something new to



learn, and there is never a dull moment with my team around.

STEPHANIE ULAM
BERKELEY PROPANE COMPANY
MONCKS CORNER, SOUTH CAROLINA

I lose track of time primarily due to the mini-computer — otherwise known as an iPhone — that a majority of us depend on daily and lives in our pocket. Don't get me wrong: Having an unlimited amount of information at your fingertips at all times can be helpful. However, it can also be distracting. I find myself going from emails to social media to Google, back to emails, back to social media for what seems brief until I look at the clock ...

CALEB WARNER
BERGQUIST INC.
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

A well-planned day with time-sensitive tasks to complete makes me lose track of time, along with doing service work for customers. Maintaining a clear focus on the job in front of you ensures all procedures are followed and the installation is safe. In my free time, I can get lost in the pursuit of bass or walleye while fishing.

ERIC PIRKL
THOMPSONGAS
OWATONNA, MINNESOTA

Believe it or not, relationships make me lose track of time at work. As a manager of people, relationships are key. My management style is all about meeting people where they are at. So I often will find myself outside at the loading station with my bobtail drivers, chatting with them about their stops that day, sports, their families, etc. I can easily spend a lot of time talking with my team, both about work and about life in general.

Relationships with my customers are also key. I've found that regular interaction with customers (both small and large) is incredibly important. This regular communication ensures their propane needs are being met and gives me a chance to work on any area where my team and I may be lacking.

I've realized a lot of my day can often just be spent talking. While relationship management is important, I also have many other things to look after as a manager. What works best for me is time management and planning.

My mornings are strategically task-oriented. I get all of the projects, follow-ups, inventory, payroll, etc., out of the way first thing in the morning. Doing this allows me to freely engage with both my customers and my employees throughout the day without having to worry about deadlines.

KRISTEN WILLIAMS [ABRAHAM]
SUPERIOR PLUS PROPANE
STERLING, MASSACHUSETTS

I like to keep it simple. Sunday morning coffee with my husband and two dogs, Marley and Cooper, is what makes me lose track of time. I measure time in cups of coffee instead.

LAURA MABEY
BASE ENGINEERING INC.
SAINT JOHN, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA

BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS

These young professionals share ideas from their perspectives on the passing of time. They seem clear-headed and provide balance. They suggest that prioritizing work, family and personal goals can improve your daily joy, as well as slowing down and paying attention.

My 14-year-old granddaughter, Stella, told me she now realizes her greatest challenge is to keep her focus and be present in the moment. We certainly know time is not going to wait for us in any circumstance. So, I will sign off with a quote from career coach and speaker Michael Altshuler, "The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot."

If you are interested in submitting responses, contact Coop at ncoop@cetane.net.



David Schlee is of counsel to the firm of Baty Otto Coronado P.C., with offices in Kansas City, St. Louis, and Springfield, Missouri. He may be reached at dschlee@batyotto.com. Visit batyotto.com.



TEXAS COURT AFFIRMS DEFENSE VERDICT IN FESTIVAL BOOTH EXPLOSION SUIT

Heritage Propane & Diocese of El Paso not liable for explosion at 4-H booth

On May 7, the Texas Supreme Court affirmed a defense verdict and a 2018 Texas Court of Appeals ruling (see BPN's December 2018 issue) in favor of propane supplier Denman Propane in a suit arising from a fire that severely injured several teenage volunteers at a church festival in Clint, Texas.

The jury also voted in favor of the Catholic Diocese of El Paso, but the Court of Appeals had overturned that verdict, ordering a new trial. The Supreme Court overturned the Court of Appeals ruling as to the diocese, holding that the original jury verdict in its favor should stand. The case involved is Catholic Diocese of El Paso v. Porter.

4-H BOOTH

Clint, Texas, is a small town just a few miles from the Mexican-American border near El Paso, Texas. Each year, the San Lorenzo Church holds a three-day festival called the Fiesta de San Lorenzo on church grounds in Clint to raise money for the parish. There are rides, games and, of particular note to this case, booths that sell food and drink. The El Paso County 4-H Leaders Association had rented a booth at the Fiesta for several years previously, and it did so in 2009.

Most of the booths that sold food at the Fiesta used propane to fuel various cooking devices, and the 4-H booth was no exception. There was a propane-fueled funnel cake fryer in the center of the booth, as well as a propane-fueled deep fryer located at the back of the booth. A steam table was also fueled by propane.

Notably, a large ice chest was located near the front counter. One of the 4-H volunteers provided two propane tanks for the booth. One of these tanks was a small ASME tank that was located near the front of the booth beneath the steam table, which it fueled. The other was a small DOT cylinder.

TEENAGERS INJURED

On Sunday, the last day of the Fiesta, the 4-H booth was staffed by four young teenagers and two adults. A small explosion or flash fire occurred, and the four teenagers in the booth sustained burn injuries. Three of them were injured badly enough to be life-flighted to a burn center in Lubbock, Texas.

From the outset, there were two possible causes identified for the event. First, it was alleged that the incident was caused by the ignition of propane leaking from the ASME tank. However, it was also alleged that the fire was caused when one of the volunteers in the booth dropped ice or water into the boiling grease of the funnel cake fryer.

The families of the severely injured teenagers sued Heritage Propane, which had allegedly (through its Denman Propane affiliate) filled the ASME tank. The families also sued the Catholic Diocese of El Paso, which through the San Lorenzo parish ran the Fiesta de San Lorenzo. They contended that Heritage improperly filled the tank and that the diocese failed to properly inspect and enforce safety protocols for the festival 4-H booth.

CONFLICTING TESTIMONY

At trial, there was conflicting testimony on multiple points. The volunteer who supplied the ASME tank said he had it filled at Heritage's Denman Propane facility. Heritage denied this, offering testimony that it had no record of such a sale.

Some witnesses said they smelled propane in and around the 4-H booth before the incident, while others said



they smelled no propane at all and still others said they smelled propane, but in the vicinity of other booths. The sound of the event was variously described as "a whoosh," "a boom" or "a pop," among other things. Some witnesses said a container with ice and/or water was passed near or over the funnel cake fryer, while others denied this happening.

The plaintiffs presented expert testimony that the overfill protection device on the ASME tank was defective, and that it was the source of leaking propane that ignited. They also presented expert testimony that the sounds described by the witnesses were more consistent with the ignition of propane, whereas a grease fire caused by ice or water would sound more like a boiling or splattering.

Their experts also argued that a grease fire would have lasted longer than what was described by the witnesses. Finally, they pointed to low-level burn patterns inside the booth and on the victims themselves, indicating this was a propane event, rather than a grease fire.

UNMOUNTED TANK

The plaintiffs also presented expert testimony that Heritage should not have filled the small ASME tank because this tank was "designed for permanent installation on a piece of equipment, such as being bolted to the side of a motor home."

> At trial, there was conflicting testimony on multiple points. ... Some witnesses said they smelled propane in & around the 4-H booth before the incident, while others said they smelled no propane at all ...

According to the expert, because Texas Railroad Commission regulations barred Heritage from filling a tank if it had reason to believe it was "not installed in accordance with statutes or liquified petroleum gas safety rules," Heritage shouldn't have filled this "unmounted" tank when it was presented by the 4-H volunteer. This expert added that Heritage should have checked the cylinder for leaks when filling it, and if it had done so, Heritage would have found the leaking overfilling prevention device (OPD).

Heritage, of course, countered with its own expert testimony. While it denied filling the tank, it presented an expert who testified that the filler of the tank did nothing wrong, and that the small ASME tank could indeed be filled without being mounted to a vehicle.

Another defense expert said the sound described by the witnesses was not consistent with the ignition of propane, and that the OPD leak was intermittent, occurring only at low pressures. Finally, Heritage presented video of various tests that an expert conducted and that Heritage said showed the incident was the result of a grease fire rather than a propane ignition.

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VERDICT & APPEAL

After a one-month trial, the jury returned a defense verdict in favor of Heritage and the diocese. The plaintiffs appealed, and the Texas Court of Appeals affirmed the verdict in favor of Heritage.

However, it reversed the verdict in favor of the diocese on the grounds that a jury finding that this was a grease fire was against the weight of the evidence. The diocese then appealed to the Texas Supreme Court, and the plaintiffs appealed the Heritage ruling.

As to Heritage, the appeal focused on the issue of whether or not Heritage had filled the tank. The plaintiffs pointed to the testimony of the 4-H volunteer that the tank was filled at Heritage, arguing that this testimony was conclusive as a matter of law. But the Supreme Court disagreed:

"The Families must carry a heavy burden to prevail in their legal sufficiency challenge. When a party attacks the legal sufficiency of an adverse finding on an issue on which it bears the burden of proof, the judgment must be sustained unless the record conclusively establishes all vital facts in support of the issue. To conclusively establish fact, the evidence must leave no room for ordinary minds to differ as to the conclusion to be drawn from it. The Families have not met this burden. Diller [the 4-H volunteer] testified that he was "absolutely certain" that he filled the tank at Denman Propane, a propane filling station owned by Heritage. However, neither Diller nor Heritage had receipts documenting this alleged transaction, and Juan Jurado, the only bottle filler working at Denman Propane in 2008, testified that he did not recognize Diller and had no memory of filling Diller's distinctive-looking gold tank. Typically, evidence becomes conclusive (and thus cannot be disregarded) when it concerns physical facts that cannot be denied. Moreover, jurors are the sole judges of the credibility of the witnesses and the weight to give their testimony, and when they choose to believe one witness and disbelieve another, appellate courts cannot impose their own opinions to the contrary. In the absence of physical evidence such as receipts, the jury was free to believe either Diller's testimony or Jurado's. Accordingly, the record does not conclusively establish that Heritage filled the propane tank at issue. We overrule the Families' legal sufficiency challenge."

Also, the court reversed the Court of Appeals ruling against the diocese. It held that, even if the jury concluded that this was a propane explosion as opposed to a grease fire, the plaintiffs had not conclusively established that the diocese had actual knowledge of some condition of the propane tank that created an unreasonable risk of harm to the volunteers. It therefore ruled in favor of the diocese.



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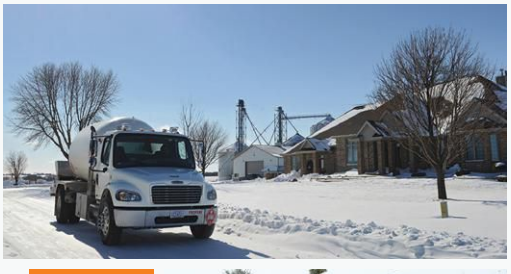

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IS YOUR COMPANY THE WORLD'S BEST?

How consistency can help your company soar to the top

BY FRANK THOMPSON



Several years ago, when I was in Indiana visiting my father-in-law, he asked me to stop at an Albanese candy store in Merrillville, Indiana. Upon entering the store, we were greeted by smiling people who invited us to walk through the candy store and view the candy being made. There were all kinds of candy in all flavors, and then suddenly, there were my favorites — chocolate-covered raisins and Gummy Peach Rings.

After I had purchased several bags of each of my favorites, I happened to glance at the wording on the candy package: "WORLD'S BEST." I kept reading. "Around here, we refer to it as WB. It stands for what we believe. We believe you deserve the world's best gummies using the world's best ingredients made by the world's best people. It's just that simple. Open a bag and share in our passion."

"World's best" got me thinking not only about what all of us should be striving for in the propane industry, but also what it means in our personal lives. We are faced with slogans like "Be all that you can be;" "There is no substitute for hard work" (Thomas Edison); "If you cannot do great things, do small things in a great way" (Napoleon Hill); and "Never, never, never give up."

All of the above inspirational mottos and slogans point to the same thing: If a company wants to be the world's best, they need to be consistent in what they do and how they do it.

People go to McDonald's for the same reason — consistency. They want a Quarter Pounder that tastes like the last one they ate; they want the large soda; and they want a clean bathroom.

This is why people buy propane from your company — consistency. They are trusting you to provide the needed services to them so their lives are more comfortable and so they can enjoy life while trusting your company to keep them safe.

So, what does it take to make your company the world's best? Here are a few points I have read from loss-prevention and governmental reports:

- The public expects your company to hire and train good people to be the world's best. Employers are all suffering from a lack of people willing to work and must contend with a shrinking population of working-age people. Every employer must search to find people who are willing to work and have the desire to learn the propane industry.
- When your company is the world's best, every employee is valued, management urges continuing education opportunities available from the Propane Education & Research Council and each employee understands their job and how they fit within the company's framework.
- Safety requires consistency. Every customer needs a completed and signed gas check form in the file. "Duty to Warn" packets are to be given to each new customer along with an

annual mailing to remind them of what to do when they smell propane.

- Management must be consistent in dealing with all team members. Remember, there is "no such thing as constructive criticism," and "positive reinforcement will make for a positive workplace." Remember that your company's culture comes from the top down.
- Every driver needs to understand that driving for your company is a privilege and not a right, and that every customer is valued and deserves the best service, with no shortcuts.

One of the common complaints from insurance company loss control personnel when visiting propane companies is a lack of consistency, which is why they ask to look at your customer files. Will they find all the files showing completed and signed gas check forms, or are there some incomplete files?

What about the drivers' files? Are they complete? How about the renewable identification number records? Are they completely filled out and legible? There is also the fairly new requirement that bobtails and transports need to be inspected daily; is this being done?

> Management must be consistent in dealing with all team members. Remember that your company's culture comes from the top down.

So how do you know if your company is the world's best? If you have been successful in hiring and training staff, your equipment is well-maintained and your paperwork is in compliance and up to date, you're well on your way. It helps, too, if your customers give positive reviews on social media.

The list can go on, but the bottom line from insurance underwriters' standpoint is that if your company is striving to be the world's best, your effort will show up on the questions and answers they receive on your insurance application, and that effort will be confirmed when they look at your five-year loss history.

We have all learned that many people refuse to take responsibility for their own actions. Our industry requires us to go the extra mile and be consistent, and therefore we will continue to strive to be the world's best.

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



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HOW TO MAKE CREDIT CARD PAYMENTS WORK FOR YOU

How propane dealers can lower the cost of accepting credit cards by 30% to 40%

BY SEAN JONES



Understanding the rates and fees that impact your bottom line can help you make more informed decisions when choosing a credit card processor, and you don't even have to become an expert in processing fees.

If you're accepting credit cards, you probably want to know how to get the best deal. But in this industry, nothing is simple, and trying to wade through different fees, interchange rates and charges can feel overwhelming.

Before getting into the special rates for propane dealers, let's discuss different fees associated with accepting credit cards — the negotiable and non-negotiable fees you pay. These fees are broken into three categories: interchange, dues and assessments and processor's markup/rate.

Interchange

This is nonnegotiable. Interchange accounts for the largest portion of your credit card processing expense, and it's paid to card-issuing banks. Believe it or not, your processor and the card brands see no revenue whatsoever from interchange. Interchange fees can amount to 75% to 90% of your processing expense. That being said, the propane industry poses a unique challenge when it comes to accepting credit cards. This is because Visa and MasterCard do not agree on your classification — more on this later.

Dues & Assessments

This is nonnegotiable. Dues and assessments go to the card brands (e.g., Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover). This amounts to roughly 0.14% of the total expense.

Processor's Markup/Rate

This is negotiable. The processor's markup over interchange and assessments is the only area where you have the ability to negotiate credit card processing fees. Keep in mind that many factors contribute to a processor's overall markup, so not everything will be negotiable.

NEGOTIATE LOWER CREDIT CARD PROCESSING FEES

To reduce your fees, insist on a cost-plus merchant account. Not only will this make it very easy for you to move your company from one processor to another, but interchange plus is the least expensive, most transparent form of credit card processing pricing.

This separation of costs keeps the processor's markup the same regardless of the type of card you accept or how you process it. There are no qualified, mid-qualified or nonqualified rates with interchange plus.

The processor earns a fixed percentage regardless of the interchange rate for a particular card type. For example, you may see an interchange plus quote of 0.25% (25 basis points).

No fancy tiers, no qualification at the processor level — just one rate that gets added to actual cost (interchange plus assessments).

TIERED OR FLAT-RATE PRICING

This is the most expensive type of pricing. You may see advertisements of a flat rate of 2.5% or 2.75%. This rate model charges you one flat rate regardless of the type of card you accept.

You may be thinking, "I only accept Visa and MasterCard." That is fine, but remember that there is a different interchange rate for each card type, i.e., consumer, check cards, rewards cards,



> Interchange accounts for the largest portion of your credit card processing expense & it's paid to card-issuing banks. Believe it or not, your processor & the card brands see no revenue whatsoever from interchange.

debit cards, commercial cards, business cards, etc. Interchange for these cards vary from 0.05% to 2.75%.

When you have a flat rate, you end up paying 2.70% (or 270 basis points) more than you should for certain cards. Tiered rate is similar, but here you have a qualified, mid-qualified and nonqualified rate — not the best option if you want to pay the least amount in fees.

Processors choose what cards clear at qualified, mid-qualified and nonqualified. This makes it impossible to accurately compare one credit card processor to another. Any of these rate structures prevent your company from receiving the preferred interchange rates for your industry.

SPECIAL INTERCHANGE RATES FOR PROPANE

Visa considers you an emerging market — or merchant category code (MCC) 5983 — Fuel Dealer. As this issue goes to the press, interchange rates for emerging markets are 1.43% + $0.05. Rates can fluctuate slightly depending on the type of credit card. MasterCard considers your industry a Utility (MCC 4900). Utility interchange rates are 0.00% + $0.45 to 0.00% + $0.75, depending on the card type (i.e., consumer, rewards, etc.).

SWIPED, KEYED & INTERNET TRANSACTIONS QUALIFY FOR THESE RATES

The problem: You can typically only have one MCC that describes your business. What this means for propane dealers is, most processors will review your processing volume and card types to determine if more Visa cards or MasterCards are accepted.

If they accept more Visa cards, they set up a merchant account for the emerging market. However, all MasterCard transactions clear at the keyed rates. If more MasterCards are accepted, a Utility account is set up, and all Visa cards clear at the higher keyed-in rate.

Only one card type will receive the preferred rate; and the other card type will clear at the higher keyed-in interchange rate.

Some processors will set up two merchant accounts — one for Visa and one for MasterCard. This can be confusing for employees, as all Visa cards process through one account, while all MasterCards process through a different account. This also creates double monthly payment card industry and gateway fees.

The solution? Work with a gateway/processor or industry-specific software company that supports dual MCCs. This allows you to receive the preferred rates for your industry without needing two merchant accounts or incurring the additional monthly fees so many other businesses experience.

You should consult with your current processor or software company to see if you are set up this way and whether they can support it. You will need to ask for MCC 4900 for MasterCard and MCC 5983 for Visa. This, along with a cost-plus merchant account, will ensure each transaction you process clears at the lowest possible interchange rate.

As a distributor, if your company accepts credit cards from other businesses, make sure to provide level three payment details with all of your commercial and business-to-business transactions.

This can lower the interchange cost of accepting credit cards by 30% to 40%. Transactions above $7,555.14 qualify for special interchange rates when level three details are provided with larger tickets. This lowers your interchange cost by up to 1.5%.

Sean Jones is president of Revolution Payments. He is a 24-year industry veteran in the credit card processing industry. Revolution Payments supports merchants ranging from gas stations and distributors to fuel dealers and government vendors. Visit revolution-payments.com.



MIKE ABRAMS: FROM ATTACK HELICOPTERS TO PROPANE FLEETS

How one man's dedication to safety & service benefits both the U.S. Army & the propane industry

BY NANCY COOP





Mike Abrams, pictured at work and on deployment.

When Mike Abrams enlisted in the United States Army after college, he began his long military service — on both active and reserve duty — as an attack helicopter repairman.

Through the years, he was deployed in support of operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom, graduated from the Officer Candidate Program and has held multiple posts leading up to his future retirement as a lieutenant colonel in spring 2022.

Abrams and I met in 2009, when he was still in the Army's inactive ready reserves and was also the director of fleet services for one of the largest propane companies in the U.S.

At the time, I was the owner of a bobtail manufacturing business that supplied trucks to his organization. From our earliest meetings, I could see Abrams had a work ethic and a personal style that would always serve him well with his coworkers and suppliers.

Although I had known Mike to be diligent and data-driven when we were discussing bobtails years ago, I've learned that his analytic mindset is a skill that bridges his multiple work projects.

His strengths as a fleet director and as an Army officer continued to develop in tandem as he applied his abilities to choreograph either trucks or people moving in concert. This past spring, he took on a new challenge to create and develop a fleet program for one of the fastest-growing propane companies in the U.S.

Clearly, his background prepared him well to take on this "dynamic, not static, process." There's a direct link; as Abrams says, "I developed a certain skill set in the Army that translates well to my work as fleet director."

While in the reserves, Abrams experienced a few combat deployments and maintained his military certifications as an officer. His dedication to serving his country is admirable. Today he is proud to provide service to communities nationwide by bringing propane — a clean-burning fuel alternative — to those folks who live beyond the grid.

He's proud of propane's environmental record as "a good niche fuel with a mature, established infrastructure. It's one of the available solutions to climate challenges."

He defines the industry as being "responsible stewards" of our environment and personally ensures his drivers are trained to conserve fuel,

FUELING THE WORKFORCE

In the July 2021 issue of BPN, we continued with the second part of an eight-month series centering on the role U.S. military veterans serve in our industry's workforce. Vets2Tech founder Jesse Lord shared about Robert Brown, military veteran and president of Broco Oil, and his dedication to keeping the power on after disaster strikes. Read Lord's July article on our website at bpnews.com/veteran-workforce-series.

which saves significant dollars and carbon emissions.

As a fuel used in every state in the nation, propane creates a diverse choice of places to work and live. In Abrams's case, having been moved around by the Army for years, he now appreciates settling down and is glad to call the Kansas City, Missouri, area home.

When asked about what keeps him motivated in the energy industry, he talked frankly about the dangers inherent in dealing with a hazardous material and how this fact has rightly resulted in the creation of a culture of safety.

In the military, people are trained to be safe, and that emphasis instilled safety in Abrams's life on the job and at home, too. He brings a "safety first" policy to his work as a fleet director.

From his first words to me about his concurrent military and civilian careers, Abrams talked about the importance of teams and how "everyone has to pull their weight."

He "started in the military in the trenches, turning wrenches" and learned discipline, leadership, tenacity and flexibility. Abrams sees the possibility for ex-military personnel to become part of a winning team within the military-friendly propane industry. Truck drivers, service technicians and fuel handlers, as well as dispatchers, customer service reps, management and office people are all needed.

For example, it's "not hard for a driver with a Class A commercial driver's license to get a hazmat endorsement if you already have a security clearance." He suggests you may use your developed skill sets or apply more training to learn new ones. This industry's employment opportunities can "dovetail very nicely with your military background."

Nancy Coop is an industry advocate. She serves as marketing director at Cetane Associates. Contact her at ncoop@cetane.net. Visit cetane.net.



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NEW YEAR, DIFFERENT PROPANE FUNDAMENTALS, NEW PLAN

As global production struggles to keep up with global demand, U.S. inventories are low going into winter

BY JOHN POWELL



It's a stark reality: Propane prices are higher and inventories are lower than they've been in years. In fact, a June 24 Bloomberg headline trumpeted, "U.S. Propane Prices Are Skyrocketing in a Rare Summer Rally," noting that propane prices had topped $1 per gallon in June for the first time since 2014. Not long after, a Wall Street Journal article published July 2 reported that domestic propane inventories are 17% less than a year ago and about 15% below the five-year average.

This year's high prices and depleted inventories remind some longtime marketers of the winters of 2013/2014 and 2017/2018 and the challenges that resulted from them.

What's causing today's scenario? A number of factors — including, of course, the pandemic, which drastically reduced global demand, causing commodity pricing to plummet. That, in turn, caused production to decrease, to allow the world to work off excess global inventories.

Since the vaccine rollout, people have begun to resume normal lives, increasing demand across the board for all hydrocarbons while production has continued to remain lower than pre-pandemic levels.

At the same time, OPEC+ continues to maintain reduced production levels while United States producers have been slow to return drilling rigs as they focus on capital discipline to shore up their balance sheets and reduce debt.

This is causing record low summer inventories in the U.S. relative to global demand, resulting in a totally new set of fundamentals that are dramatically different than we have seen in the past.

As a result of 2020's lack of a spike in winter demand — particularly in both Asia and Europe — many central governments have already started preparing for this upcoming winter well in advance. They've told their respective energy companies to make sure they are not caught short again like last year.

These central governments, particularly in Asia, are making sure they are well stocked with liquified petroleum gases (LPGs) and liquified natural gases (LNGs) going into the winter, having already booked shipments for the winter time frame. They are basically taking every bit of LPGs and LNGs they can get their hands on, and they won't stop until they're full. So, ships are loading up in the U.S. and pointing east toward Europe and west toward Asia.

This early, global pre-buying is causing all propane and butane markets to be backward in the third and fourth quarters of this year, which is, in turn, causing companies to not store nearly as much product in the summer as needed for the upcoming winter.

As if those factors aren't enough to make propane marketers nervous going into this winter, Chris Roth, Crestwood's vice president, East Marketing and Supply, sees additional supply risks due to higher flat price and backwardation in the forward curve (lower prices expected in future months).

"Higher propane prices require significantly more capital and create cash flow constraints when it comes to storing barrels from summer into winter," said Roth. "Additionally, with a 'backward-forward price curve,' there is no incentive and too much risk for suppliers to store barrels. That means few, if any, 'wet' contingency barrels will be available for immediate access, as is typically available in times of peak demand and/or supply disruptions unless consumers take action today."

What does all of this mean for propane marketers? Supply could get really tight in the U.S. if we see even the slightest increase in weather-related demand. There is still time, however, to consider the fundamentals this year and firm up your supply plans, and then be alert to supply issues that may arise earlier than normal this year.

Establishing a Solid Supply Plan

Given all of these factors setting the stage for this winter, let's walk through some key steps to developing a supply plan for your operation:

1. Start by analyzing your customer base. What will your customers need? It's best to take an analytical approach, using data from the past few years and spanning different weather and economic situations.
2. Identify the number of gallons you typically sell during the winter months, broken out by week and month.
3. Assess your customers' buying behavior, considering early-fill customers, those who choose your fixed-price option, the needs of your large commercial accounts, etc.
4. Consider the impact of energy conservation and/or energy efficiency. Are your customers lowering their thermostats or taking other measures to conserve energy?
5. Evaluate your local economy. How is it

IT WILL BE IN EVERY **MARKETER'S BEST INTEREST TO PLAN AHEAD** (SITTING DOWN WITH YOUR SUPPLIERS SOON TO CREATE A PLAN) & THEN **COMMIT TO STAYING ON TOP OF WHAT'S HAPPENING** IN THE INDUSTRY, BOTH FROM **A GLOBAL & LOCAL PERSPECTIVE.**

faring following the pandemic? Is unemployment high or does your local community seem to be bouncing back fairly quickly?

6. Know the available storage in your secondary and tertiary tanks. Can you accurately calculate the amount of empty storage in your system? Plan to fill early and often to make sure all tanks are full. This will dramatically lessen the impact of any supply disruptions which typically occur to varying degrees during the winter.
7. Factor Mother Nature into your assumptions. Study weather patterns from the last few years and do your homework to find reliable, long-term forecasts. Use an average winter's weather as a baseline — bracketed at the top by your coldest winter in recent years and at the bottom by your warmest winter in recent years — then correlate propane volumes for a range of possible outcomes. Although weather can always be unpredictable, study the patterns from the last few years and consider reliable, long-term forecasts.
8. Don't overlook weather events that meteorologists are predicting. Remember Winter Storm Uri that walloped Texas this year? According to Bryon Muchow, Crestwood's vice president of mid-continent supply and marketing, forecasts gave about a two-week notice of the below normal temps. Because of the lack of heating degree days prior to February, most retailers had the tanks in the field on the top side and were prepared for some winter weather. Once the system turned into a major winter event now known as Uri, the mid-continent market reacted quickly, bringing additional barrels into the market and working with customers to ratably deliver gallons to ensure everyone had adequate supply during the storm.
9. Put a contingency plan in place. Muchow said, "The challenges caused by Uri last year help to validate the need for marketers to build contingency plans into their yearly supply 'blueprint.' And once that blueprint is in place, continue to work closely with your suppliers to monitor those plans throughout the winter months, meeting your agreed-upon contract amounts, regardless of what Mother Nature does."
10. Tailor your supply chain. After you have analyzed your customer base and considered the impact of weather on your supply plans, spend time with your suppliers planning for your market.
11. Diversify your supply points. Make sure you don't have all of your eggs in one basket. Consider working with suppliers that offer different supply points and sources so that if one source has challenges getting a delivery of product, you'll have access to supply from other locations. It may cost you a few additional pennies, but having propane when you need it is worth a few cents.
12. Cultivate supplier relationships. You'll need your suppliers to come through for you in the winter, so it's important to develop a solid working relationship in advance. Planning ahead, entering into supply agreements and buying on schedule builds equity with wholesalers. That way, when you're in need of supply in the middle of winter, you'll have earned allocations.
13. Focus on trucking. Trucking is often the first link in the supply chain to break, so having enough transports and bobtails staffed with qualified drivers is a must-do for a successful winter ahead.

Plan Ahead, Be Aware of Higher Prices & Stay Alert

This upcoming winter is likely to be a challenging one. Given today's high prices and low inventories, a lot of factors will be in play. As a result, it will be in every marketer's best interest to plan ahead (sitting down soon with your suppliers to create a plan), then commit to staying on top of what's happening in the industry, both from a global and local perspective. Planning ahead and thinking about the market differently this year will not only get you through the winter, but it will also help you keep your customers happy, minimize any disruptions and make for a smooth and profitable winter.

John Powell is senior vice president and head of Crestwood's Marketing, Supply & Logistics (MSL) Group. Crestwood's team of propane industry professionals helps marketers create supply plans tailored to their business needs. He can be reached at john.powell@crestwoodlp.com. Visit crestwoodlp.com.



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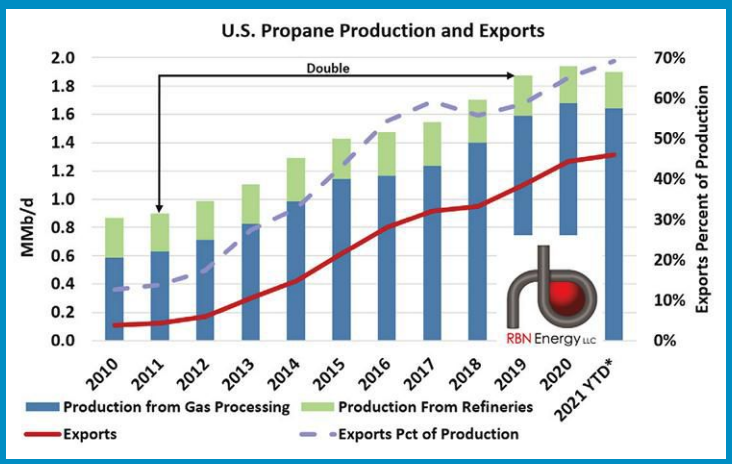

Figure 1

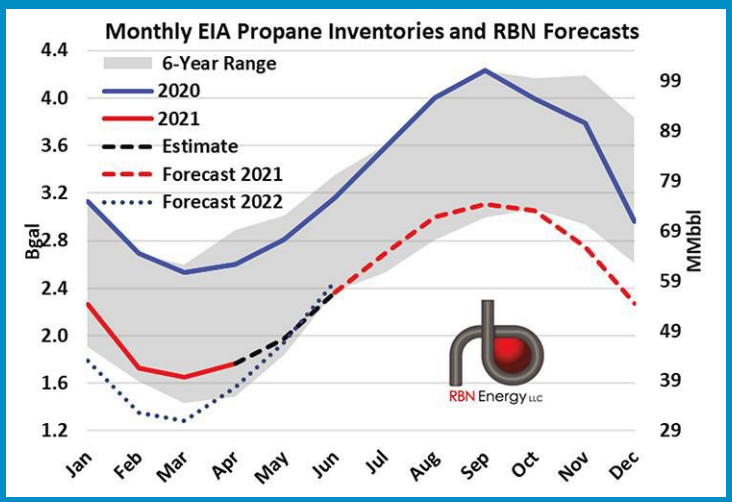

Figure 2

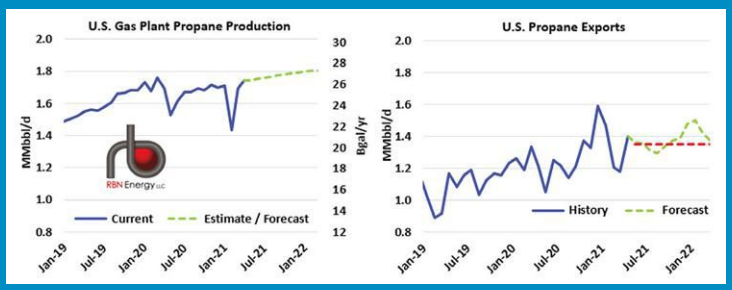

Figure 3

For the past year, Rusty Braziel, founder and executive chairman of RBN Energy (located in Houston, Texas), has correctly warned BPN readers about the challenges presented by the ever-increasing exporting of United States propane. In a blog dated July 7, 2021, "Skyrockets in Flight — Propane Headed Toward Uncharted Territory," Braziel presented the backstory on how U.S. propane surpluses have eroded in recent years amid modest production growth but near record-high export volumes. Here are some excerpts:

"Fourth of July skyrockets were not the only fireworks earlier this week. The price of propane skyrocketed up to 112 c/gal before the holiday weekend and held at that level through Tuesday, an increase of about 21 c/gal or 23% over the past month alone. To put that in perspective, that's the highest price for propane since April 2014, back when crude oil was over $100/bbl. Although propane came off a few cents on Wednesday in sympathy with falling crude prices, both Mont Belvieu and Conway propane prices are still almost 135% higher than this time last year.

Assuming crude prices don't fall off a cliff, how high could propane prices go? Hard to say. The propane market is experiencing unusually low inventories, relatively modest production growth, near record-high export volumes, and unconstrained dock capacity. Consequently, if we continue to see strong demand, but U.S. producers stay focused on capital discipline, thus constraining production, propane prices could be considerably higher this winter.

NAVIGATING THE POTENTIALLY DIFFICULT WINTER AHEAD

Analysts discuss propane supply's uncharted territory as winter 2021-2022 approaches

BY PAT THORNTON

"We've been worrying about propane on a regular basis for over a year now, and it's all about exports. Here's the backstory. Most propane is a byproduct of oil and gas production (blue bar segments and left axis in Figure 1), with a smaller volume a byproduct of oil refining (green bar segments). Years ago, as the Shale Revolution was kicking in, the production of propane ramped up, with volumes doubling between 2011 and 2019 (black arrows labeled "Double"). But propane demand in the U.S. consumer (retail, etc.) and petrochemical sectors was flat, so there was only one way to balance the market: exports (red line and left axis). The problem was, in the early days of shale-driven propane production growth, U.S. dock capacity was insufficient to export all of the surplus, and international demand was only experiencing modest growth. The result was restrained exports. That pushed U.S. propane prices into the doghouse. For the next five years, propane production tended to stay ahead of international demand and export dock capacity, resulting in surplus market conditions most of the time. U.S. propane consumers — everyone from backyard BBQ-ers to huge petrochemical plants — enjoyed cheap propane, for a while.

"Then the market responded — just as you might expect. International buyers — especially in Asia — expanded plants to use a lot more U.S. propane, and midstream companies built out more U.S. dock capacity to enable additional exports. By the end of the 2010s, it looked like U.S. propane markets were headed toward tight market conditions, with U.S. demand competing head-to-head with exports, which by then accounted for about 60% of the demand for U.S. production (dashed light blue line and right axis in Figure 1). But then COVID happened, and that put the looming supply/demand imbalance in limbo. Propane production fell off along with crude, natural gas, and NGLs. Petchems cut back on propane purchases. Already bulging inventories increased toward record highs. And export volumes dropped, but not for long.

"In very short order, exports returned to pre-COVID levels. That was the canary in the coal mine — the first signal that trouble was coming. Propane exports seemed to be relatively impervious to the COVID disruptions that continued to roil other energy markets during 2020.

By mid-year the implications were clear: Constraints on exports — both on the supply end with U.S. dock capacity and the demand end with international requirements — had been relieved. As we've stated in several blogs, most recently in "Higher," now the only way U.S. propane inventories can be built back up in the summer/fall seasons to ensure adequate stocks to meet winter season demand is for U.S. propane prices to get so high that export cargoes get canceled, effectively keeping those barrels in U.S. storage."

Where Is the Market Headed?

"Fast-forward to July 2021. Propane exports are still running high, and production is up, but only slightly," Braziel said. "As a result, stocks have not been replenished at a rate necessary for the market to be comfortable by the onset of winter season demand. Figure 2 lays out RBN's assessment of propane stocks over the next 12 months in the context of historical trends, showing propane inventories last year (blue line), the six-year monthly high-low range (gray area), actual EIA monthly inventories for 2021 through April (red line), RBN's estimate of inventories in May and June based on EIA weekly data (dashed black line), our forecast for the balance of this year (dashed red line) and finally our forecast for the first six months of next year (dotted blue line)."

Noting there is a lot of information, he said these are the main takeaways:

- Inventories have been scraping along the bottom of the six-year inventory range and have been running about 20 million barrels (850 million gallons) below last year.
- June inventories rose by about 9.3 MMbbl (391 MM gallons) to 56.3 MMbbl (2.4 billion gallons), which is about 200 Mbbl below the five-year minimum.
- Over the next four months, inventories will build to levels slightly above the six-year minimum, but that will not be enough to keep stocks from falling below the minimum for the November 2021 through March 2022 period.

"Of course, in the calculations necessary to develop the graphic in Figure 2, many premises must be set and assumptions made," Braziel said. "Two of the most important of these are shown in Figure 3. The left graph indicates that U.S. propane production from gas processing has been increasing gradually since the COVID-19 meltdown in the spring of 2020, interrupted by February 2021's deep freeze. Over the year, production is up about 8%, recovering to pre-COVID levels in April. We expect that the rate of propane production growth will slow over the coming months, but still come in with about a 3% increase over the next year (dashed green line).

"The more significant assumption is in our assessment of propane exports," he said. "Based on our forecasts, propane exports will continue at an average of about 1.35 MMb/d (dashed red line in right graph), which is only slightly higher than where exports have been since mid-2020 after the meltdown, other than a blip lower during February's deep freeze." He noted this assessment assumes that exports will be constrained by high propane prices in the U.S. compared to prices in Asia, resulting in the cancellation of some cargoes.

"However, note that we do expect an increase in exports during the early part of winter 2021-2022 (peak in dashed green line) as seasonal Asia demand pulls in more barrels, regardless of price," Braziel said. "It is during this period when U.S. markets are likely to be particularly exposed to very high prices, especially if cold weather in the U.S. were to coincide with cold weather in Asia. If things play out that way, it would be truly uncharted territory for propane markets."

Braziel and his team at RBN Energy are responding to the increased market concerns with a new weekly publication, "U.S. Propane Market Update & Outlook."

More Supply Factors to Consider

"Inventory and days of supply — these two items have been the focal point of most fundamental propane analysis for years," said J.D. Buss, trading and risk management advisor at Twin Feathers (located in Overland Park, Kansas). "They remain viable analytical tools, but they need three things added into the mix to provide an accurate picture."

He described the first and foremost need as the status of U.S. propane exports. "Over the last decade, propane exports have outstripped domestic U.S. demand. Calendar year 2021 is already on pace to set another export volume record. Looking into the future, U.S. propane prices continue to be supportive through calendar year 2022. And most importantly, U.S. propane prices remain one of the lowest (if not the lowest) value, which will continue to support propane export growth."

Buss noted that propane production has been on an uphill climb for the last decade. "However, the first half of 2021 has seen production rates that are steady and holding in a narrow range. Going back a year, many thought propane production would be 2.4 million bbls or more per day. Yet current values stand at 2.3 million bbls per day. Not having a possible 100,000 bbls per day for half a year generates an inventory deficit of 18 million bbls. Something to consider as we move forward through 2021."

A final item to consider according to Buss: an inventory reality check. What does he mean by that? "Belvieu (Gulf Coast inventory) will most likely be used for exports, not the domestic U.S. market. Conway inventory, which in prior decades has been the major Midwest reserve, could merely be a holding location for Gulf Coast exports."

He believes days of supply available is important data to review, but it may be more vital to look at that stat on a regional basis.

"Total inventory available will always be a telltale indicator for prices but … regional U.S. prices may be more informative and predictive as a retailer moves through winter."

Buss has been working with his clients at Twin Feathers to add the new dimensions and data points to the factors they are taking into account when making supply decisions.

Anne Keller, managing director at Midstream Energy Group, noted there were concerns about supply tightness last winter, especially in outlying areas, because production in regions outside Texas was slowing dramatically and the Chinese tariff on imported propane was lifted in March 2020.

"Removing the 25% tariff immediately kicked off an increase in exports to China that largely offset the falloff in domestic demand," Keller said. "One of the unheralded but very important issues for those who need to understand the propane markets is that the EIA is only charged with tracking the portion of the hydrocarbon market that is considered to be part of the energy space. But nearly 50% of U.S. NGL production, including basically all the ethane, goes into the petrochemical market. The inventory statistics we see in the EIA reports only include barrels in commercial storage and at refineries, which are considered available to the 'energy' portion of the hydrocarbon market. Inventory held by chemicals is not surveyed since it's considered to be a raw material for manufacturing."

Keller said the industry has recently seen bumps in inventory in the Gulf Coast, which are not all due to the cancellation of cargoes. "Some of these represent transfers from chemical storage back into commercial facilities. This isn't new supply; it's just shuffling the barrels we have."

"With propylene prices as strong as they are and six new on-purpose propylene units due to start up in China this year, it's not hard to imagine a 'coyote moment' for the market in the not-too-distant future where prices really spike," Keller said. "The 'Product Supplied' number that's shown in Energy Information Administration balances doesn't represent the total market, but a lot of people assume that it somehow does represent total domestic demand."

She said that with cargoes gobbling up 500,000-600,000 barrels at a time, and limited insight on where total inventory balances really are here on the Gulf Coast, just a few liftings can really change the picture. "Basically, we've finally rebalanced the U.S. market to the point it was before the shale boom, where propane trades in a range closer to its Btu value versus crude again. Only now we have customers overseas who have converted to LPG to take advantage of its cleaner-burning, more environmentally-friendly properties. And their governments can step in to subsidize some of the cost if the market is tight. That's not the case in the U.S."

NPGA Provides Weekly Supply Updates, Resources for Members

"Over the years, the industry has seen its fair share of stresses on the domestic liquified petroleum gas (LPG) supply and logistics' infrastructure: hurricanes, polar vortices, rail strikes, freezing/ice events, wet crop harvests, etc.," said Steve Kossuth, vice president of global LPG supply at UGI Corp. (parent company of AmeriGas). Kossuth also serves as chairman of the National Propane Gas Association's (NPGA) Propane Supply and Logistics Committee.

"The universal truth remains that stresses on the system are unpredictable," he said. "While the inputs of stress may be ever-changing, the best practices to combat supply interruptions remain largely unchanged: planning and communication."

Kossuth said retailers should continue the best practice of considering the type of customers they are supplying, where they are geographically located, taking interest in their supply chains, questioning how their supply and transportation providers are prepared to support their business in the upcoming season and having conversations early and often about planning and execution.

"Considerations of demand, supply, storage, mode of transport (pipeline, rail, truck, length of haul, etc.) and appropriate storage levels are specific to each of our respective businesses.

No two businesses are alike," Kossuth said. "Nobody can predict the future, but education, relationships and communication are the best tools to combat this uncertainty. There is always concern about surety of supply; that is what produces better plans and ironically promotes enhanced surety of supply. The efforts of the excellent people in our industry to navigate change and adapt are remarkable. Suppliers, retailers, pipeline and storage operators, truck drivers, rail crews and terminal operators are all part of this solution."

"In the wake of the polar vortex, the NPGA had a focused task force produce a white paper of recommendations for retailers to utilize to enhance their surety of supply and increase understanding through education so that informed decisions can take place," Kossuth said. "I am particularly proud of the work of the NPGA's Propane Supply and Logistics Committee and the NPGA staff in getting the word out and providing its membership with weekly and monthly supply updates. We have received wonderful feedback on this approach, and retailers, suppliers and transporters have benefited from these efforts."

He said the industry has also developed its infrastructure since this white paper was produced.

"There are more supply points across the United States than in prior years with the development of storage, pipeline, rail and truck infrastructure."

"The NPGA is working on a webinar to take place late this summer for market fundamentals aimed at reviewing what has happened this summer and what things are looking like from an industry perspective heading into winter," Kossuth said. "During this same webinar, the NPGA is working on demystifying pipelines, and we will hear from a panel composed of a pipeline operator, a midstream marketer and a retail customer. Better understanding the ecosystem of pipelines and how shipping on these excellent resources works will allow retailers and suppliers to hold better, more informed dialog regarding supply via pipeline. It is the hope of the [Propane Supply and Logistics] Committee that this will lead to better risk assessments and more robust supply planning as we head into this and future winters."

Editor's Note: Find the extended version of this article, including further commentary on specific trends coming out of the Southeastern U.S., on our website at bpnews.com/2021-supply2.

Pat Thornton is a 25-year veteran of the propane industry, with 20 years at Propane Resources and five years at Butane-Propane News. He has served on the PERC Safety & Training Advisory Committee and the Missouri PERC Board of Directors.



BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN WORRY ABOUT CYLINDER SAFETY:

Take a walk with a friend.



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6 KEYS TO CONSUMER MARKETING AFTER THE PANDEMIC

How the last year has changed the game for business promotion

BY AMANDA BACON-DAVIS



We've all heard it and we've all said it: "The last 16 months have been crazy" — to put it mildly. The year 2020 feels like a strange dream for many of us; for some, it feels like a missed year. Where did all that time go, and how did we get here so quickly? Our country is opening back up, and we are consuming products and services in ways that, two summers ago, we probably would have never imagined.

"Normal" may be back, but it is a new normal, regardless of how you spin it. One thing we can all agree on is that over the last year and a half, our interactions with each other have changed, from our personal lives to the ways in which we conduct business.

We went from conference rooms to Zoom calls, even if we were in the same building. We saw our friends outdoors and at respectable distances, and we created bubbles for ourselves and our families. If we didn't create a bubble willingly, we were put in one, whether we liked it or not. Office doors closed for "walk-ins." Customers needed to be vetted for symptoms before a technician could go to their home, and even then, they needed to keep their distance when possible. Groceries were delivered, our favorite eat-in restaurants became takeout joints, and Amazon became an even greater friend.

With all these new ways we've been interacting, what impact does that have on how we market to customers and potential customers today? In short, it impacts everything.

The way you communicate to your existing and potential customers must be rethought, and that boils down to marketing. For anyone who thinks marketing is an overhead expense, the data doesn't lie.

It's not overhead; it's an investment that needs a seat and a voice at the table. What follows is some information to consider as you adjust your company's marketing post-COVID-19.

ONE VOICE

All marketing must have the same feel and voice. If you have designated multiple people within your company (who don't work in marketing) to run your social media accounts, write customer letters, craft newsletters or create email blasts, they should all be funneled to one person — preferably the person with the best writing skills. This person should be editing the content before it reaches a customer.

Using one voice in your company to speak to your audience will keep your messages clear and concise. If this is a change in someone's job description, they should be compensated accordingly, as this will show them how much you value this aspect of your business.

Why It's Important

Your company is a brand, and right now customers are being wishy-washy about brand loyalty. According to Forbes, consumers want to see companies standing behind their values and being truly authentic in what they believe in, and that needs to come through in the content you are generating. Every communication with a customer is content. Make that content consistent and meaningful.

COVID-19 EXCUSE

The "COVID-19 excuse" is old and tired. The only time it is acceptable is if a policy has changed to make your workplace safer for your employees and customers. Remember, regardless of the obstacles

your company faces, you are in control of one thing, and that is the experience you and your team provide to your customers.

With COVID-19, customers are now measuring their experience with you, not only against your competitors, but against their last excellent customer experience. You may not be Amazon or Starbucks, but your service is compared to them daily. Relationships matter.

Why It's Important

Customers need to be treated with respect. COVID-19 excuses are frustrating to consumers; they want what they want, and they want it now.

For example, if you can't make a delivery to a home or business on the day a customer wants one, do not fall back on, "Due to COVID-19, our team is short-staffed, so we cannnot make a delivery to you today."

Coach your team to answer honestly. Perhaps the answer is that you're sorry, but you aren't in their area today and they aren't on automatic delivery. But you would love to get them set up so this doesn't happen again.

IT'S A DIGITAL WORLD

According to the Harvard Business Review, consumers want a digital relationship with you. In fact, they are going to demand it. Digital relationships are here to stay. Customers want to schedule deliveries and service online and on phones and pay bills with ease.

Why It's Important

Your customers are busy, and your newer customers are younger. Both busy and younger individuals want to be able to do anything that needs to be done with ease, and that almost always means digitally on their phones.

In the case of a fuel delivery/service company, that means getting product/service when they want it and paying bills when needed. This is part of managing your relationship with your customer, whether a current or potential one. When you give them an easy platform on which to do these things, they will appreciate that and feel valued.

> Remember, regardless of the obstacles your company faces, you are in control of one thing — the experience you & your team provide to your customers.

THE COMEBACK

Email marketing is here to stay but making a comeback in your marketing wheelhouse is direct mail. Both have advantages and disadvantages, but according to a recent study by Marketing Sherpa, 76% of people trust the advertisements they see in the mail and prefer direct mail over email.

Why It's Important

Direct mail reaches people on an emotional level. They are receiving something from you and therefore feeling more of a connection to you. What must be considered is that email has a better return on investment, and direct mail — while more expensive — can have a better response rate, according to HubSpot.

VISUALS

People are home more than ever before and are valuing their homes differently. When marketing to your customer base, you can rethink your messaging and its visual impact. For example, instead of a family sitting outside around a propane firepit, perhaps you show someone working in their home office with a new ductless split, enjoying the comforts of home, installed by you.

Why It's Important

People who used to spend money on traveling, entertainment or going out to eat are still reallocating that money to home improvements. According to a study from Harvard University, home improvements and repairs grew to nearly $420 billion last year. Consumers are spending, and you can be a part of that.

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Finally, don't forget about the people who run the company: your employees. Every single one of your employees matter. Your frontline employees need to be as engaged as your management team.

If your employees aren't happy and engaged with what you are doing, they cannot bring life to your values and prove your marketing to be authentic. Tell them why and how what they do matters, and include them more in decision processes.

Why It's Important

Leadership within a company is your greatest asset. If your team is happy and feeling like they are working toward a common goal, your company will be healthier, and your customers will be on the receiving end of that happiness. Don't confuse leadership with power. Leadership is about followership, plain and simple.

Setting the direction, steering the ship, letting the team know where they are going and why, and giving them the tools to be successful is what leadership is all about. Happy employees go home happy and show back up to work happy. It's cyclical and wonderful, and when it works, you will not only feel it, but you will also notice it in your bottom line.

Amanda Bacon-Davis is the president of Savvi Strategies, a business consulting firm and a former division director in the retail propane industry. Her influential approach to business culture has led her to speak about leading the next generation both regionally and nationally. Visit savvistrategies.com.



MISSOURI SCHOOL DISTRICT REDUCES EMISSIONS & CUTS COSTS WITH AUTOGAS SCHOOL BUSES



How MOPERC is normalizing propane as a reliable & trusted fuel

BY ELIZABETH MANNING

When Independence School District (ISD), located near Kansas City, Missouri, began looking for options to replace the district's fleet of aging diesel buses, one choice stood out from the rest: propane autogas. "It wasn't a mandate, but it was a direction we decided we wanted to go in, and the cleaner fuel makes a difference," said Dr. Lance Stout, ISD deputy superintendent of operations.

The district, which is made up of 30 buildings and approximately 9,500 students, runs about 100 routes per day, including special needs and early childhood. Its fleet of 128 buses now includes 11 Blue Bird propane buses. ISD chose Ferrellgas to build the fueling infrastructure and provide the fuel. The district now has one station with two fuel pumps and an 18,000-gallon tank at its transportation facility.

ISD partnered with the Missouri Propane Education & Research Council (MOPERC) to make use of the council's rebate program, which allowed the district to realize savings when making the switch to autogas. The following are a few relevant stats:

- 10,000 to 12,000 miles traveled per bus, per year
- Approximately 3,000 gallons of propane autogas per vehicle, per year
- $2,000 estimated annual reduction in fuel costs per bus, per year

The school district plans to add 10 more autogas school buses per year. In the following article, BPN talks with MOPERC President Steve Ahrens and ISD Director of Transportation Daryl Huddleston about the partnership.

BPN: Can you give us a brief background of MOPERC and the autogas program?
SA: MOPERC is a not-for-profit organization created by state statute to implement research, development, education and marketing programs for the benefit of Missouri's propane consumers. In 2017, MOPERC committed $1 million to support school districts in their adoption of propane school buses. Our program is designed to supplement the state of Missouri's VW Environmental Trust Mitigation plan. We offer $2,000 rebates per bus, for up to 10 buses per district per year, with a total annual budget of $100,000. We anticipate making this funding available for the life of the state VW program, which ends in 2027. Since we began the program, we have provided $84,000 in funding that helped put 42 buses into service. Last year, we also created a separate funding mechanism for schools that lease-purchase their fleets. The Diesel Replacement Initiative and Value for Education (DRIVE) program offers no-cost financing for qualifying acquisitions.

BPN: What did the MOPERC funding process look like for this project?
SA: We're delighted that ISD has taken advantage of our rebate program for two years in a row. This underscores the reliability of the vehicles, fuel and benefits to the district of operating autogas equipment. The process for districts to access the rebate program is extremely simple: The school official or their bus contractor lets MOPERC know they are acquiring propane buses, and we set aside the funding.

What strategy does MOPERC have in place that other associations can adopt for use in their own school districts and local municipalities?
SA: MOPERC's goal in the autogas market is to make sure propane is seen as a reliable and trusted fuel. Our aim is to normalize the reality of propane vehicles — that we aren't an experimental gimmick but instead represent cutting-edge technology. The incentive programs give us the opportunity to begin conversations that create a favorable sales climate with potential customers.

It's interesting to note that some schools have added propane buses even without the incentive. For example, the contractor who operates the buses for Kansas City's public schools made the decision to use propane, unaware of our

rebates. The bottom-line savings and benefits were so compelling that our incentive was nice, but not critical.

BPN: What advice do you have for adapting conversations to this particular audience?
SA: We don't sell propane or propane-powered vehicles, so we rely on vehicle manufacturers and propane retailers to make the sales calls and facilitate the adoptions. Our outreach consists of maintaining visibility and awareness of our product and its benefits.

MOPERC has sponsored webinars; provided speakers and exhibits at school organization events; written blog and social media posts; engaged in postcard, letter and email campaigns to various school audiences; and secured state and trade media coverage about propane school buses. We want to provide "air support" where it will do the most good and then rely on industry experts to fine-tune the approach.

An important aspect is sharing autogas success stories since the experiences of their peers is a critical factor for transportation directors and superintendents. In the school bus market, we've found that once one district realizes the benefits of propane buses, others in the area are more likely to consider them when it's time to replace an aging diesel bus.

BPN: Why is it important that local and state groups take an active role in promoting autogas?
SA: The autogas market is not the kind of business you can earn with a brochure. We believe the industry's best chance to win this business is to provide demo vehicles and on-site fueling to allow the customer to understand the actual ease and savings of propane vehicles. Therefore, MOPERC has made a substantial commitment to reach beyond schools and into the transit market. We are partnering with a manufacturer to purchase a propane-powered paratransit vehicle for local demonstrations. We will support those opportunities with mobile fueling infrastructure. And we've extended our $2,000-per-vehicle rebates for transit vehicles as well.

Our transit outreach is a sizable expense, but the opportunity is urgent. Given the Biden Administration's stated goals to reduce emissions, which puts diesel and gasoline vehicles in the crosshairs, we believe propane is positioned as the best alternative to battery-electric fleets due to the high cost of electric vehicles and charging infrastructure. Our commitment is to target the highest Missouri transit priorities but also to make this equipment available to other states that want to partner in the effort.

BPN: What are the benefits of making the switch from diesel to autogas?
SA: The focus on reduced emissions often results in favorable comparison for propane autogas vehicles over diesel units, but it's hard for many to visualize nitrogen oxide reductions or carbon footprint data.

What we hear most often — every time, actually — from bus drivers is their appreciation of the reduced noise level in propane buses that lets them operate more safely and the quick heating, which makes the cabin comfortable on cold days. Some districts in northern Missouri have to run their diesel buses all night in order to ensure that they'll be available for morning routes, but propane drivers love just turning the key and starting up.

BPN: What challenges make school districts a perfect autogas customer?
SA: Propane's drawback in the school market is that it is too perfect. When every single feature is superior to what they are currently using, districts think there must be a catch.

The challenge is to let school and municipal customers know that propane has been doing the job quietly and effectively for years in applications just like theirs, and that making the decision is not a leap of faith but, rather, the best solution to a problem that isn't going away. Electric vehicles get so much publicity that they are seen as the default option, so we need customers to see, feel, drive and hear propane vehicles to understand that there is a better choice.

BPN: What were the top reasons for switching from diesel to propane?
DH: The top two reasons were fuel cost savings and environmental impact. Propane buses significantly lower emissions, as well as maintenance and fuel costs, compared to their diesel counterparts. The transition from diesel to propane improves operational and financial efficacy of the district's transportation.

BPN: Can you discuss your strategy of adding 10 propane buses per year?
DH: The budgetary component to this process allows the district to spread out the expense.

The ISD purchased the ten initial propane buses and fueling station using a MOPERC and an EPA Region 7 DERA (Diesel Emissions Reduction Act) grant received through Leonardo Academy. The ISD hopes to replace more diesel buses with propane buses over time.

BPN: Is the refueling infrastructure something that is easily replicated in other locations across the district?
DH: The refueling station is located at our bus lot where all ISD buses return on a daily basis. While the refueling infrastructure could be replicated, our current refueling station will serve our needs for the foreseeable future without the need to expand.

BPN: What barriers do you think remain for school districts that have considered autogas?
DH: Infrastructure costs could create barriers for school districts.

BPN: How can propane companies help navigate those challenges?
DH: Grant opportunities help with the initial costs of transitioning to propane-powered buses and eliminate some of the barriers districts may face.

Elizabeth Manning is the editor of Butane-Propane News.



MEETING MEMBERS WHERE THEY ARE

NPGA's Women in Propane Council takes D&I to a state level

BY ELIZABETH MANNING

Council members at a roundtable session in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2014. All of the women pictured were volunteer leaders on various levels within the organization.

These days, diversity is a business buzzword no matter what industry you're in, and it's gaining traction in propane, too. The increasing discussions around diversity are necessary and beneficial to the industry, but what a good number of companies get wrong — in every industry — is the direct follow-up to creating a diverse working environment: creating an inclusive one, too. And it's not just a follow-up. Sometimes one of the biggest factors holding a company back is the lack of a welcoming and inclusive company culture for all employees.

The National Propane Gas Association's (NPGA) Women in Propane (WIP) Council was founded to tackle just that — assist members of the propane industry (both men and women) by providing a supportive community founded in promoting diversity AND inclusion (D&I). According to Nancy Coop, founding chair of the council and current marketing director of Cetane Associates, the conversations that brought about the founding of the council were started by Tom Jaenicke, who mentioned he had noticed similar organizations in other industries and there was a need for one in propane.

Members of NPGA, including Jaenicke and Coop, worked together to form a steering committee to help formulate the group's mission and how it would operate within NPGA. In 2012, the national board of directors approved the creation of the association's third business council: the NPGA Women in Propane Council.

"It was — and is — a business council," Coop said. "That spring, we had our first meeting, which was a roundtable session in Atlanta, Georgia. All of us that came together at that meeting decided then what we wanted the council to be. [Attendees] were very clear. They wanted training, connectivity, a forum for their voices to be heard and resources to help them advance their careers. And they had many and specific ideas."

Nancy and the rest of the founding members compiled those ideas and figured out what was feasible for the board to achieve. Some of those original ideas are still ongoing initiatives that have proven their value over and over again. The council's mission — to inspire industry leaders through training, development and collaboration — is lived out through its various programs (see the sidebar on page 35).

The council's governance includes a volunteer executive board, committee leaders and the council's members. Meetings are held throughout the year via Zoom to manage council initiatives, progress and general business. Memberships are available on an individual or corporate level. The council has had up to 1,000 members at one time or another, but currently has around 500 members. Industry leader Amerigas has been a frontrunner in terms of corporate involvement in the council. Jennifer Jackson, current chair of the council and region director with Amerigas, said UGI Corporation and Amerigas have prioritized D&I across its organization, so its involvement in the council is just the next step in the right direction.

"They understand how important it is to the success of the company, and they are consistently working to put policy and action in place to achieve their goals," Jackson said. "We are an organization that truly appreciates the talent that we have and invests in our people to build development and create career opportunities."

"Numerous studies show gender-diverse boards have improved company

ONGOING INITIATIVES

The council was founded not just to create a support community for women in the industry, but also to offer leadership training, professional development, D&I support and more for both men and women. Here are a few ongoing initiatives:

- ***Knowledge Exchange*** — The council has an annual mentoring program that sets up mentors with younger mentees in the industry. They meet by phone, electronically or through social media. The mentor/mentee team meets for about an hour every two weeks over six months and can choose from 48 areas of development to focus on during the course.
- ***Leadership forums*** — The council engages experts in their respective fields to host both virtual and in-person training events. Topics covered at these events include management essentials, sales success, finance, communication, interpersonal skills, technology, public speaking, professional development, negotiation, problem-solving and leadership.
- ***DiSC training*** — The council offers in-depth certified leadership training on the DiSC profile and how to use it in a business setting. The DiSC test is a behavior self-assessment tool that centers on four personality traits: dominance, influence, steadiness and compliance. Both men and women in the industry have the opportunity to learn how to use the profile assessment to inspire others, resolve conflict, make sound decisions and mentor next-generation leadership.
- ***Roundtable sessions*** — One of the council's earliest focuses was on creating industry roundtables at various events. The roundtable sessions and networking receptions and lunches offer council members and other industry professionals a chance to connect face-to-face at NPGA conferences and board meetings throughout the year.

performance. Historically, our industry has had extremely low percentages of women, especially in key leadership positions. This is an incredible industry for women, and it's important that we share that message," Jackson said.

Coop agreed, saying that while the industry is quick to adopt some progressive trends, it can be slow in welcoming others. "I think it was a benefit, though, for this council to be coming of age when the entire nation was becoming more aware of the need for D&I in the workplace," Coop said.

This year, the council has shifted its focus slightly from growing membership at a national level to connecting with members first on a state and local level.

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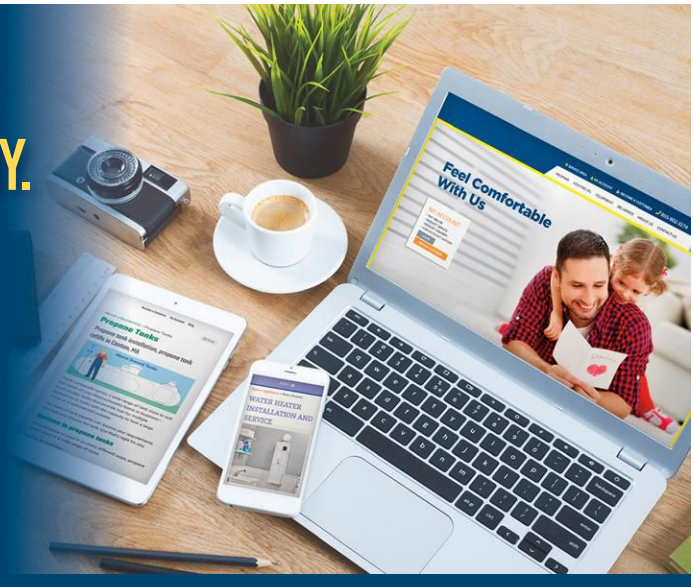

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The council launched an Association Engagement Committee, which Jackson said will be crucial in bridging the gap of communication to the industry's state associations and increasing involvement and leadership opportunities.

The state-level involvement strategy has been a topic of conversation for the council's board for a few years now, but never gained traction. In early 2021, Leslie Anderson, president of the Propane Gas Association of New England and a member of the council, volunteered to bring the conversation to her state meetings, saying that the move would be a win-win for the council and both the national and state associations.

By creating a community at the state level for women, NPGA would see increased involvement at national meetings as well, according to Anderson. See page 37 for a profile on Anderson and her career in the industry.

According to Coop, the model for this initiative started with the Western Propane Gas Association (WPGA) board meetings. Coop had started requesting time to discuss the new council, and, next thing she knew, people from WPGA were coming to events and joining the council. "That's what we see happening across the country," Coop said. The council is currently recruiting state ambassadors who will spread the council's message throughout the industry.

"They are responding positively and see the value of Women in Propane programming for their own members. At this early stage, there are some state leaders who are already putting Women in Propane presentations on their agendas," Jackson said.

Laurie Irish Jones, CEO of Irish Welding and Irish Propane, past president of the New York State Propane and Gas Association, and current executive board member of the council, said the states have the ability to reach out to all potential employees in the industry. "This in and of itself will further D&I in our industry. When you have training for all types of positions available, this gives many opportunities for the individual to seek out their best career path with no limits," Jones said.

At the end of the day, the goal of the state-level involvement initiative is the same as the overall goals of the council: to increase D&I on an industry-wide level.

"We need to make a concerted effort to look at all positions in our industry and have the mindset that women can be truck drivers, technicians, CEOs, etc. We have seen movement in this regard, but we need a conscious effort and priority to make it happen," Jones said.

Interested in getting involved? Email wip@npga.org with questions or visit npga.org to learn more.

Elizabeth Manning is the editor of Butane-Propane News magazine.



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WOMEN IN PROPANE ARE HERE TO STAY

After a lifelong career in the energy industry, Leslie Anderson is no longer the only female at the table

BY KAREN MASSMAN VANASDALE



Leslie Anderson, president and CEO of the Propane Association of New England, was sitting in the back of a legislative hearing room for six hours. She had been crocheting a scarf for her mother for two of those hours while waiting to testify about the environmental benefits of propane when she heard reference to "the dirty fossil fuel lobbyists."

When she was finally called to testify, she identified herself as one of the "dirty fossil fuel lobbyists." A female senator casually asked what she had been making in the back of the courtroom. "It completely turned around the conversation," Anderson said. "I had an immediate rapport with a third of the women on the committee. It wasn't intentional. It's all about how you relate and how you make a human connection."

With more than 30 years of experience in the environmental and energy fields, including more than 20 as an attorney, Anderson is accustomed to being the only female at the table. But she has seen a shift as more women are entering the industry and moving into leadership roles. "Being a woman has been an advantage," she said. "I'm definitely not your typical stereotype when you think of 'dirty fossil fuels.'"

Today, there are many smart, assertive women in the propane sector making an impact, especially in advocacy, she said. The industry is evolving and is more welcoming to females than other industries. Many women in leadership positions today are second or third generations working in family businesses started by their fathers and grandfathers.

"There are also many women running propane associations," Anderson said. "Now when you go to state association leadership meetings, there are more women than men in the room at times."

Women already in the propane industry are also proving a conduit to help women in the field. "The industry as a whole has been so welcoming to women," Anderson said. "I don't think the industry has ever kept women down. And so many men are close to retiring in their 50s and 60s; they have also been mentoring and promoting women."

Another distinct facet of the propane industry is the willingness to work together. "If a truck slides off the road, many local companies will step up to help one another. This is very unique to the propane industry; I don't see that as frequently in the heating oil industry," she said.

After starting her career in Houston, Anderson graduated from the University of Texas, obtained her master's in environmental management science and began her career as an environmental supervisor at Paktank Terminal, the largest U.S. bulk chemical storage terminal. She soon started her own environmental consulting business, where she interacted with many attorneys. At age 29, she decided to go to law school.

During her last round of summer school, she needed to catch up with course work and decided to attend the Vermont Law School, known for its environmental law program. It was a life-altering experience, catapulting her to New England. "There were so many places you could enjoy in the summer, and it was not hot and humid," she said.

For the next 14 years, Anderson served as in-house counsel at Dead River Company, where her many responsibilities for the energy provider included risk management, regulatory environmental and industrial hygiene compliance and development of policies and training programs. She

also coordinated and conducted numerous acquisition due diligence environmental and safety inspections. She took a brief sabbatical from the provider side of the industry to work for the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. While speaking at a Maine Propane Summit and connecting with former peers, she felt homesick for the propane industry. In January 2017, she became president and CEO of the Propane Gas Association of New England, primarily providing advocacy, education and networking opportunities for the 800-plus members. The association covers Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. Her role also includes participation with the National Propane Gas Association and the Energy Marketer Associations in those six states.

"Safety training and education is obviously a large priority for members," Anderson said. "If we have any kind of safety incidents among our members, they affect the entire industry, and it's not good for the industry."

A large percentage of Anderson's time, however, is spent promoting and educating people about the benefits of propane. "The advocacy has become more and more of a challenge in New England. There are numerous bills trying to electrify everything. I spend more time on advocacy issues because of this. Educating consumers and legislators about propane — it's clean and has lower emissions."

In the U.S., the environment is becoming more and more important as young people come into the workforce and reach voting age. This generation has an awareness and drive to do more for the environment, she said.

"New England has always been more progressive than most parts of the country. There has always been a liberal push across the country, and issues that we used to fight on a national level have trickled to state levels," she said, adding that politicians have incorrectly lumped propane into the category of a "dirty fossil fuel."

Unique to legislation in New England is that anyone can introduce virtually anything they want, so many extreme environmental groups target these states to get bills passed more easily. The new legislature then sets precedents for other state and national legislation.

"Propane is so clean burning. It's really a tool for reducing emissions," Anderson said. It's an important alternative fuel and has a great role to play, especially in transportation. School, city and shuttle buses powered by propane, for example, have cost much less and are more efficient than other alternatives; one electric-powered bus is the price of four

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> Her advice to people entering the propane industry: 'If you are a woman, there's nothing holding you back if you are willing to work hard.'

propane-powered buses, she said.

What people often don't understand, she added, is that in trying to save the environment, they don't see that propane-powered vehicles still have a tiny carbon footprint, and the emission reductions from propane due to its low cost far outstrips electric buses. Spending state money to buy five electric buses for a rich community versus buying 20 propane buses for a poor community would achieve far greater reductions in emissions and would be the right move from an environmental perspective.

"I think it's a great time to be in the industry. I truly believe our industry is going to be a part of the climate solution. Our business did not shut down during COVID-19: propane-heated showers for the homeless; providing heat for the vaccination centers; drivers, technicians and customer service reps kept working," Anderson said. "We were part of the energy and pandemic solution for keeping the nation going."

While traveling slowed down for Anderson during COVID-19, she said the upside is she can now attend three legislative hearings in three different states all in the same day via Zoom from her home in Cumberland, Maine.

She has also been able to spend more time with her son, a high school sophomore, and her partner Jon, an attorney for the Maine Turnpike. They enjoy taking walks, playing board games and spending time at their lake house.

Her advice to people entering the propane industry: "If you are a woman, there is nothing holding you back if you are willing to work hard."

Karen Massman VanAsdale is a contributing writer to BPN whose Women in Propane column has profiled the accomplishments of women across the globe. A former newspaper editor, she is an award-winning marketing communications leader and board member of her local chapter of International Association of Business Communicators.



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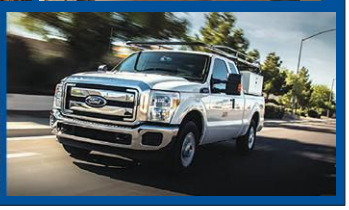

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PROPANE INDUSTRY TRAINER AND REPRESENTATIVE To Serve Minnesota Propane Association

The Minnesota Propane Association (MPA) is seeking proposals to fulfill training and industry representation. Services to begin for calendar year 2022 with a 1-3 year contract. MPA is seeking an individual (preferred) or company who can provide industry training as well as regulatory expertise in the areas of DOT compliance and the application of NFPA 58 and 54 codes.

The individual or company must have the following capabilities to train on, but not limited to the following training areas:
- Instruct select Certified Employee Training Courses provided by the Propane Education and Research Council.
- Instruct select refresher and specific training classes.

Additional details:
- Training and industry representation will be at various locations throughout Minnesota.
- Individual should plan for approximately 80 days of industry training per year.
- Individual should plan for approximately 60 days of industry representation per year.
- Individual proposal should include all costs to provide services on a "full time" basis.
- Individual or company will be required to proctor certification exams and perform skill assessments, as necessary.
- Individual may work as a contractor or employee.

All proposals will be kept strictly confidential unless otherwise stated.

Please submit written proposals by to:
Dave Wager, Executive Director
Minnesota Propane Association
12475 273rd Ave NW, Zimmerman, MN 55398

For Questions Contact:
Dave Wager 763-633-4271
Email: dave@mnpropane.org

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Display Classified: $125 per col. inch, 1 time; $110 per col. inch, 6 times; $85 per col. inch, 12 times, $70 per col. inch, 24 times.

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Undisplayed Classified: $1.40 per word; $1.75 per word for boldface type or all capitals, $65.00 minimum charge per insertion. Ads will be set in 7 pt. type without border in magazine style unless otherwise specified.

Blind Box Replies: If a blind box care of Butane-Propane News is used, add $35 to regular ad rates. All replies to blind box number ads should be addressed to classified@bpnews.com or Butane-Propane News, P.O. Box 530067, Birmingham, AL 35253-0801.

Please include department number of ad on envelope.



Richard (Rick) Carron

President
Superior Propane

Editor's Note: Carron was recently named president of Superior Propane following Greg McCamus's retirement earlier this year.

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR START IN THE INDUSTRY? I was introduced to the industry when I began my career at Superior Propane in 2011. I was recruited to revamp Superior Propane's sales strategy and organization.

Working in executive and senior leadership roles for over 20 years in energy and telecommunications provided a good foundation for strategies that I have been able to transfer over to the propane industry.

IS THERE A TOOL OR TECHNOLOGY YOU RELY ON TO DO YOUR JOB? Superior Propane's customer experience survey platform is a valuable tool that presents real-time information about customer sentiment and satisfaction. Insights and metrics gleaned from this tool help us improve the customer experience at every touchpoint, from tank installation to propane deliveries to customer service.

Also, in today's environment, Microsoft Teams and Zoom have become very important tools to allow me to interact with our various teams across Canada.

WHAT'S THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU HAVE EVER RECEIVED? A former boss used to tell me, "Say what you think, not what I want to hear." I embody this approach in my day-to-day work and encourage others around me to be just as approachable and transparent.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE SOMETHING IN THE PROPANE INDUSTRY, WHAT WOULD IT BE? I encourage government to level the playing field for low-carbon fuels and recognize that — like natural gas — propane can play a key role in presenting innovative solutions to reducing emissions.

Whether it is upgrading homes from oil to propane or converting vehicles and fleets from higher carbon fuels, propane can be a partner in reducing Canada's emissions, and it can do so now, without the need for expensive and lengthy infrastructure investments and associated environmental impacts.

Patience is a practice that you control. Practicing patience in leadership is important because it helps me step back & listen to find better ways to do things.

Canadians, businesses and the overall industry need more government incentives and programs that give them the flexibility to decide on the low-carbon fuel of their choice. Such programs will help to increase awareness of propane and butane as a viable alternative to carbon-intense fuels like diesel and heating oil.

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU WISH YOU KNEW EARLIER IN YOUR CAREER? Patience is a practice that you control. Practicing patience in leadership is important because it helps me step back and listen to find better ways to do things.

WHAT QUALITIES MAKE A STRONG LEADER? Effective leaders have strong communication skills, including those softer skills like transparency and empathy. They are also collaborative, open to new ideas and have the mindset to make them come to fruition. Other important qualities a leader should have include integrity and gratitude.

WHAT ARE YOU READING? I am currently reading "Start With Why" by Simon Sinek. More important than what we do as an organization is why we do it. The organizations that can articulate why they exist are also often the most successful ones.

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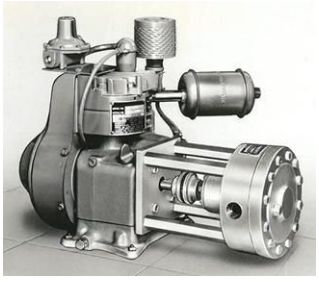


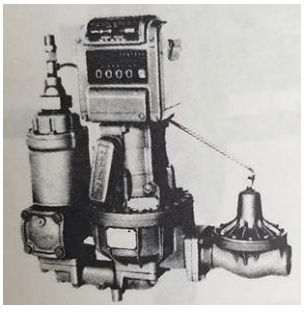

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Teeco is a Proud Member of Our Local and National Propane Industry Associations

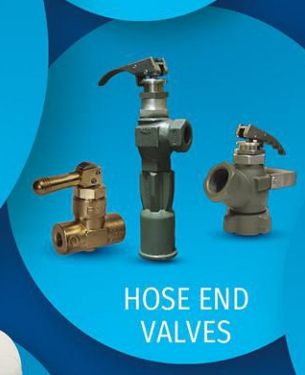
NPGA National Propane Gas Association · WPGA Western Propane Gas Association Member · PPGA Pacific Propane Gas Association · Rocky Mountain Propane Association · CPGA Colorado Propane Gas Association · Arizona Propane Gas Association · NDPGA North Dakota Propane Gas Association · NMPGA · Nevada Propane Dealers Assn. Exceptional Energy Since 1925 · WIP · South Dakota Petroleum & Propane Marketers Association





















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