BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

BPN

MAY 22









TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Ferrellgas leaders discuss the challenges of improving DE&I in the propane industry

+ What's Trending in Cylinders & Cylinder Exchange

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Dear Readers,

Make no bones about it — a more diverse workforce equals a stronger one. The women in this month's Women in Propane section, which BPN publishes annually, echo this belief. And while promoting career opportunities for women is paramount to them, their focus is a bit broader — more diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) for all who are either currently working in or interested in joining the propane labor force. This can only help as the industry — and every other one needing any type of employee, it seems — deals with a shortage of skilled, qualified workers in what we're now calling the Great Resignation.

On page 28, find the start of the 2022 Women in Propane section, sponsored by Blue Peak Resources, which includes stories and commentary from women at RegO, Boston Environmental and Ferrellgas on how they are promoting the growth of DE&I both in their own companies and for the industry overall, as well as advice for how you can implement improved hiring processes and keep a pulse on the level of DE&I your own employees measure in your company.

This month's feature series, beginning on page 22, is all about cylinders and cylinder exchange. Hear from AmeriGas Director of Safety Compliance and Training Chris Wagner, about the company's safety processes and training program for employees delivering and servicing cylinders, as well as tips the company gives its customers to ensure safe and proper handling of cylinders at home. On page 24, the National Propane Gas Association's Cylinder Exchange Council talks overarching trends and the council's goals for 2022 aimed at helping marketers who offer cylinder exchange programs overcome the challenges of the current market.

This month, part of the BPN team heads back to Reno, Nevada, to attend the 72nd Annual Western Propane Trade Show & Convention, hosted by the Western Propane Gas Association. This region of the United States is often a leader in emerging trends and implementing new propane technology, and our team is looking forward to speaking with marketers on the show floor, as well as exhibitors displaying their equipment and solutions.

Speaking of trade shows, if you were not able to attend the National Propane Gas Association's Southeastern Convention and International Propane Expo last month, look to our website in the coming weeks for multimedia coverage from the event.

As always — I hope you enjoy this issue and thanks for reading!



ELIZABETH MANNING
Editor

BPN
BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

STAFF
Editor
Elizabeth Manning
emanning@cahabamedia.com
205-278-2827

Associate Editor
Jessica Graham
jgraham@cahabamedia.com
205-961-3387

Contributing Editors
Steve Relyea
Pat Thornton

Account Executive
Landen Franklin
lfranklin@cahabamedia.com
205-278-2875

Client Services — Team Lead
Sonya Crocker
scrocker@cahabamedia.com
205-314-8276

Art Director
Melanie Magee

Circulation Manager
Lori Masaoay
customerservice@cahabamedia.com

PUBLISHER
Matthew G. Conroy President & CEO
Matt Lyons Chairman
Greg Meineke VP of Sales
Terri McVey Creative Director
Brandon Whittemore Controller

Newsletter editorial communications and subscriptions for BPN Pricing & Supply should be directed to
P.O. Box 530067, Birmingham, AL 35253.
Phone: 205-212-9402
Email: customerservice@cahabamedia.com

AFFILIATION
NPGA
NATIONAL PROPANE GAS ASSOCIATION

SUBSCRIPTION PRICES
U.S. – one year, **$34,** two years, **$50.** Canada – one year, **$43,** two years, **$65.** All other countries – one year **$70,** two years **$108.** Air mail **$50** per year extra. Single copy price within the U.S., Possessions, and Canada, **$10.**
Butane-Propane News, Subscription Dept.,
P.O. Box 530067, Birmingham, AL 35253.

ID STATEMENT
Butane-Propane News (ISSN 0007-7259), is published monthly by Cahaba Media Group, 1900 28th Ave S, Ste 200, Birmingham, AL 35209-2642.
Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, AL and additional mailing offices (USPS 457-950).
For Customer Service, email CustomerService@cahabamedia.com or call 205-278-2840.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to Butane-Propane News, Subscription Dept. P.O. Box 530067, Birmingham, AL 35253.
VOLUME 54 ISSUE 5

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May 2022



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Feature Series
Cylinders & Cylinder Exchange

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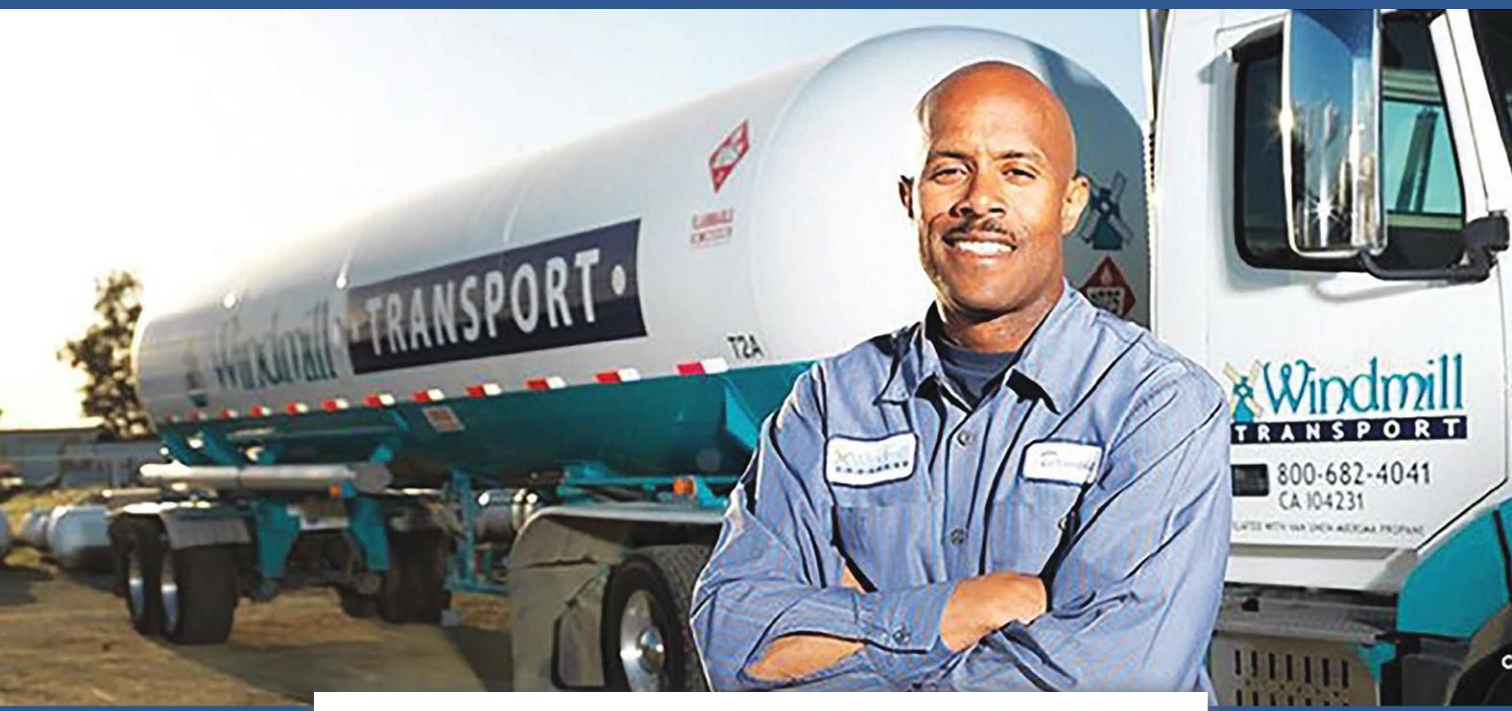
On the Cover
Ferrellgas leaders detail the company's strategy for promoting career growth to its diverse workforce.



Thinking About Selling Your Propane Business?

Choose a buyer with a culture that values people.



"Although I was nervous when I first heard our company was being sold, the transition has basically been seamless. In fact, my team has barely noticed the difference. EDP has done everything they said they were going to do, and I'm absolutely pleased to be a member of the EDP family."

Dennis Runnels
General Manager
Van Unen–Miersma Propane

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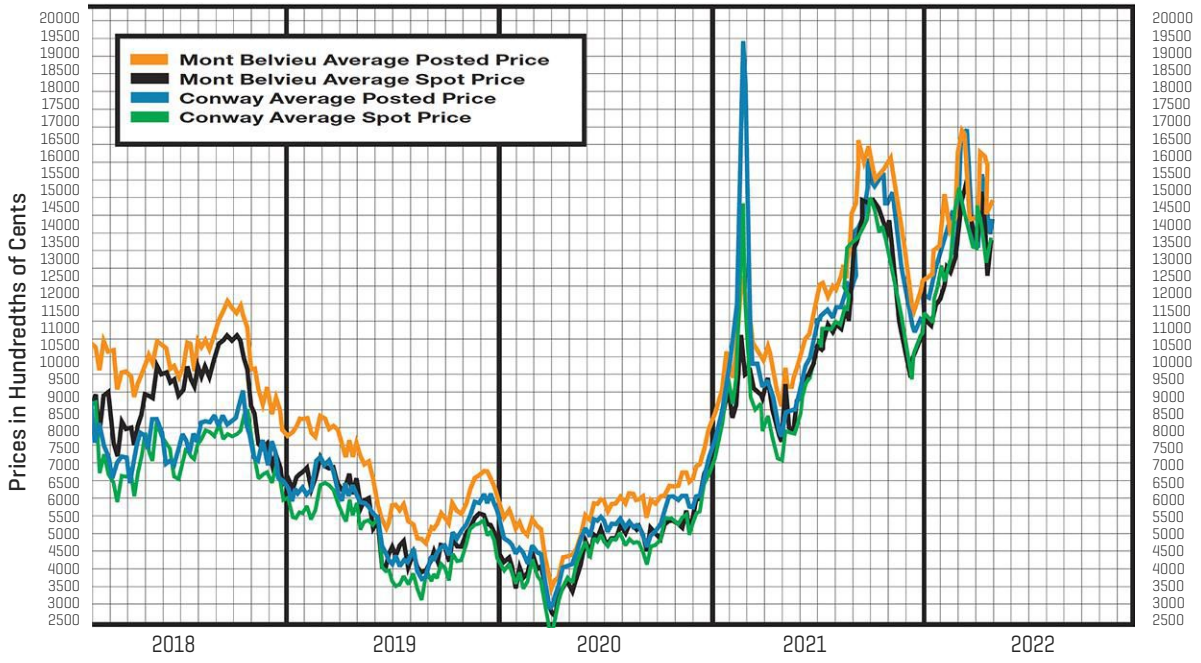
MONT BELVIEU & CONWAY AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES



at a glance: During the latest mid-month period, prices at Mont Belvieu, Texas, continued to mostly increase as we head into spring. The posted prices increased by 5.584 cents/gal, from March mid-month to April mid-month, while the spot prices increased 1 cent. Conway, Kansas, postings ended with a 5.6-cent increase and spots decreased 4.25 cents over the month.

Mont Belvieu Postings

The Mont Belvieu mid-March posted price was 137.922 cents/gal. The next week the price increased by 19.5 cents to 157.422 cents, followed by a 2.666-cent decrease to 154.756 cents the last week of March. Prices then decreased 14.584 cents to land at 140.172 the first week of April. At mid-month, postings increased 3.334 cents to land at 143.506 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in April 2021, the April 2022 prices were 53.5 cents higher.

Mont Belvieu Spots

Mont Belvieu spot propane opened the mid-March period at 132 cents/gal. The next week the price increased by 14.5 cents to 146.5 cents, followed by a 9.5-cent decrease to 137 cents the last week of March. Prices then decreased 13.75 cents to land at 123.25 the first week of April. At mid-month, they rose 9.75 cents to land at 133 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in April 2021, the April 2022 prices were 55.375 cents higher.

Conway Postings

The Conway mid-March posted price was 131.498 cents/gal. The next week the price increased by 21.05 cents to 152.548 cents, followed by a 4.45-cent decrease to 148.098 cents the last week of March. Prices then decreased 13.3 cents to land at 134.798 the first week of April. At mid-month, postings increased 2.3 cents to land at 137.098 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in April 2021, the April 2022 prices were 57.951 cents higher.

Conway Spots

Conway spots opened the mid-March period at 131.5 cents/gal. The next week the price increased 12.25 cents to 143.75 cents, followed by a 6.75-cent decrease to 137 cents the last week of March. Prices then decreased 14.75 cents to land at 122.25 the first week of April. At mid-month, they rose 5 cents to land at 127.25 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in April 2021, the April 2022 prices were 55.625 cents higher.

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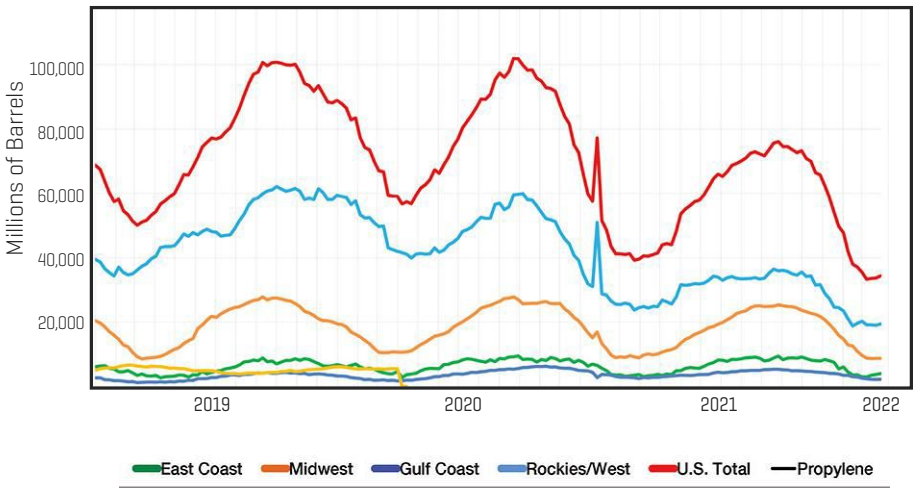
MID-WEEK AVERAGE POSTED/SPOT PROPANE PRICES (Cents per Gallon)

	3/17/22	3/24/22	3/31/22	4/7/22	4/14/22
Mont Belvieu					
posted	137.922	157.422	154.756	140.172	143.506
spot	132.000 – 132.875	146.500 – 147.250	137.000 – 141.375	123.250 – 125.500	133.000 – 133.500
Conway					
posted	131.498	152.548	148.098	134.798	137.098
spot	131.500 – 132.000	143.750 – 146.000	137.000 – 139.500	122.250 – 123.250	127.250 – 130.000

at a glance

United States propane stocks experienced a 2.051-MMbbl increase from March to April. East Coast stocks rose 125,000 bbl, the Midwest increased 221,000 bbl, the Gulf Coast rose 1.713 MMbbl, and the Rocky Mountain/West Coast decreased 8,000 bbl. Compared to the same time in April 2021, the April 2022 stocks were 5.229 MMbbl lower.

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES March 11, 2022 - April 8, 2022



Editor's Note: *From April to the beginning of October, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) does not report residential prices for propane. Publication of this data will resume with the October 2022 issue. Additionally, at print time, Canada Energy Regulator had not published updated data for LPG underground inventories in April (Canadian inventories data). BPN will resume normal publication of Canadian propane and butane inventory data in its June 2022 issue. Look for an April update on Canadian inventories on our website, bpnews.com.*

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

March 11, 2022 - April 8, 2022, and One Year Ago (Thousand Barrels)

	4/8/22	4/1/22	3/25/22	3/18/22	3/11/22	4/9/21
East Coast	3.075	3.983	3.725	3.469	2.950	3.103
Midwest	9.049	8.720	8.732	8.680	8.828	9.795
Gulf Coast	20.869	19.419	19.042	19.171	19.156	24.883
Rocky Mtn & West Coast	2.366	2.254	2.210	2.245	2.374	2.806
U.S.	35.359	34.375	33.709	33.564	33.308	40.588

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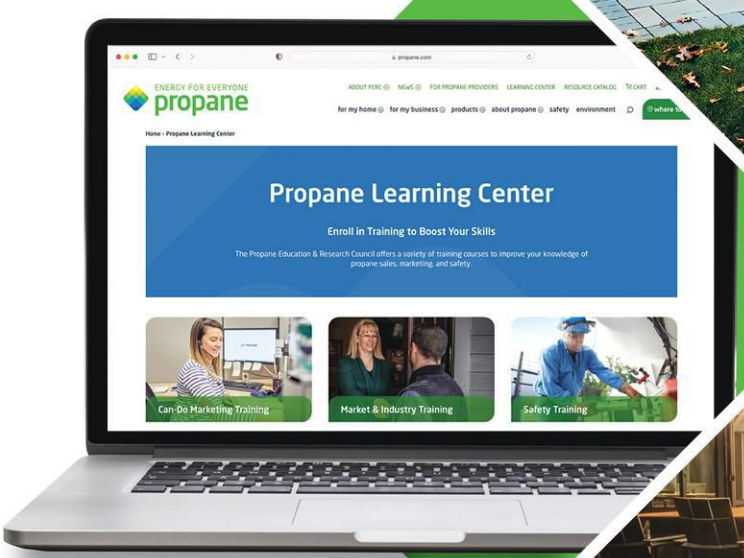



Propane Education & Research Council

ARROW TANK & ENGINEERING OPENS NEW SERVICE FACILITY IN NEBRASKA

Arrow Tank and Engineering opened a new facility in Grand Island, Nebraska, in March. The scope of work includes bobtail and transport repair for LPG, NH3 refined fuels and fertilizer, PVKI testing, ASME code repair, meter calibration and parts. The company also announced that Russell Booth has joined the team. Booth has 25 years of expertise in the propane and refined fuel industry. He will primarily perform mobile service work with the flexibility to utilize the Grand Island facility as needed. Mike Browning has also joined the team in Grand Island to assist in scheduling work, customer service and parts orders. Browning brings 20 years of industry experience and knowledge. The Grand Island operation is managed by Nate Jacobsen. The company's 165,000-plus-square-foot facilities in Cambridge, Minnesota, will continue to produce propane bobtails, transports and storage tanks.

SUPERIOR PLUS CORP. ANNOUNCES AGREEMENT TO ACQUIRE QUARLES PETROLEUM INC.

Superior Plus Corp. announced it has entered into an agreement to acquire the retail propane distribution and refined fuels assets of Quarles Petroleum Inc. for an aggregate purchase price of approximately US$145 million (CA$180 million) before adjustments for working capital. The acquisition, which is subject to customary regulatory and commercial closing conditions, is anticipated to close in the second quarter of 2022. Founded in 1940, the Quarles Delivered Fuels Business is an established retail propane distributor servicing approximately 55,000 residential and commercial customers primarily in Virginia. Quarles has 29 propane bulk plants, one rail terminal, approximately 3 million gallons of storage capacity, a fleet of 197 vehicles and approximately 181 employees.

SHV ENERGY & LANZATECH NZ ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP

SHV Energy and LanzaTech NZ Inc. announced a new strategic partnership to employ LanzaTech's Carbon Capture and Transformation (CCT) technology to bring renewable propane and other sustainable fuels to the market via existing and novel pathways. The collaboration will be dedicated to further expanding LanzaTech's existing CCT technology and synthetic biology platform, which transform waste carbon into sustainable fuels and other materials, such as fabrics, packaging and other products. Using a variety of abundant waste feedstocks, LanzaTech's technology platform highlights a future where consumers are not as dependent on virgin fossil feedstocks for so many basic consumer products in their daily lives. SHV Energy is committed to pioneering new solutions to offer customers an immediate, viable and cost-effective solution to de-fossilize their off-grid energy needs. Renewable propane is already available and is enabling many customers worldwide an opportunity to achieve deep de-fossilization goals as they significantly reduce their reliance upon carbon intensive fossil fuels.

BLUE BIRD APPOINTS TOP EXECUTIVE FOR GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT



Jim Nelles

Blue Bird Corporation announced the appointment of Jim Nelles as senior vice president, global supply chain management, with immediate effect. In his current role, Nelles is responsible for optimizing Blue Bird's global supply chain; ensuring best-in-class cost, quality, and throughput; and forging long-term strategic partnerships to secure critical components. Nelles has more than 20 years of international leadership experience in supply chain management and operations. Most recently, he advised Fortune 500 industrial companies on procurement, supply chain, distribution, due diligence and negotiations. Before then, Nelles served as director of supply chain for private equity company American Securities from 2015-2019. Leading up to his role at American Securities, he held executive leadership positions at SteelSeries, LG Electronics, Roland Berger, and McKinsey & Company, among others.

DAVENPORT ENERGY INC. PROMOTES NEW PRESIDENT



Hal Thornton Jr.

Davenport Energy Inc., a provider of gasoline, diesel fuel, propane and DEF products, announced the promotion of Harold (Hal) E. Thornton Jr. to president. Thornton joined the company in 1995 as human resources director and quickly rose to several supervisory and management positions, including his most recent as executive vice president. Thornton was employed by North American Locating Inc. before joining Davenport Energy. Davenport Energy is a diversified provider of petroleum products to residential, commercial, industrial, agriculture and convenience stores across Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia and Tennessee. Founded in 1941, Davenport Energy provides propane and fuel oil to more than 30,000 customers.

CETANE ASSOCIATES NAMES TAMERA KOVACS AS DIRECTOR OF ITS FINANCIAL ADVISORY FIRM



Tamera Kovacs

Cetane Associates LLC announced that Tamera Kovacs has joined its financial advisory firm as director. Kovacs has spent the last 20-plus years in the retail propane/delivered fuels industry with much of that time performing M&A advisory, business consulting, transition planning and business valuation services. Kovacs is a regular speaker at industry trade shows, and she is a published author for business trade journals. Kovacs has touched every aspect of sale transactions including financial modeling, valuation analysis, confidential marketing, due diligence, contract review and negotiation of final closing documents. Before joining Cetane Associates, Kovacs spent 23 years with Propane Resources in various roles, including senior advisor for their M&A consulting group.

Industry Calendar

May 10 Western PGA Board Meeting
westernpga.org
Reno, NV

May 10-12 Canada Gas & LNG Conference
canadagaslng.com
Vancouver, Canada

May 11 Propane Marketers Association of Kansas Board & Annual Meeting
pmak.org
Topeka, KS

May 11-13 2022 Western Propane Trade Show & Convention
westernpga.org
Reno, NV

May 12-13 The Oil & Gas IoT Summit
oilandgas-iot.com
Lisbon, Portugal

May 13 Oklahoma PGA Board Meeting
okpropane.org
Oklahoma City, OK

May 17-18 PERC Advisory Committee Meeting
propane.com
Greenville, SC

May 17-18 Wisconsin PGA Convention & Board Meeting
wipga.org
Green Bay, WI

May 22-23 Annual Women in Energy Conference
wewomeninenergy.com
Uncasville, CT

May 23-27 28th World Gas Conference
wgc2022.org
Daegu, Korea

May 25 West/Rocky Mountain/Pacific Region Townhall Meeting
propane.com
Phoenix, AZ

June 8-10 NPGA Annual & Board of Directors Meetings/Propane Days
npga.org
Washington, D.C.

For additional calendar items, visit bpnews.com.

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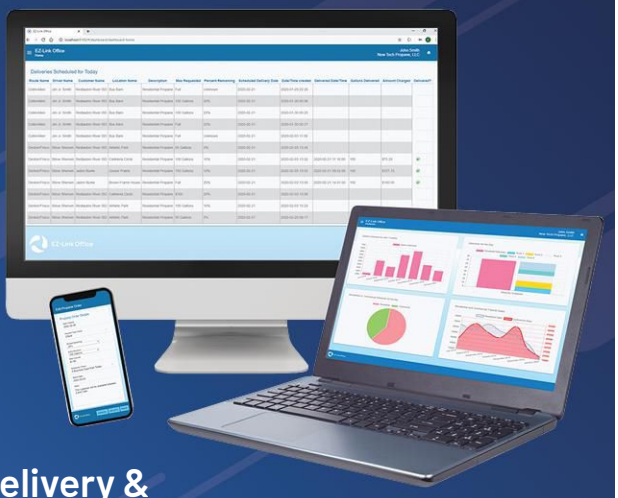

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Nancy Coop is an industry advocate. She serves as marketing director at Cetane Associates. Contact her at ncoop@cetane.net. Visit cetane.net.

WHAT IS ONE MISTAKE YOU WILL NEVER MAKE AGAIN?

Industry colleagues on the life lessons that have stuck with them

Which mistake in life stands out as one you will never make again and why? Our colleagues share their mistakes and some of the wisdom they learned. 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.

NEVER AGAIN!

One mistake I'll (probably) never make again is accidentally getting on the wrong airplane. I was flying out of Houston, Texas, to Washington, D.C., in the days before tickets were scanned, and in this rotunda area there were several gate entrances literally within a few feet of each other. (This is my excuse and I'm sticking to it.)

I was looking forward to meeting my dad and two uncles in D.C., where they were sightseeing and I had a meeting to attend. I got on the plane and after a couple hours, the pilot came on and mentioned there was a good view of the United States Capitol outside the right windows. Uh-oh. The plane was headed to Boston, Massachusetts.

The airline put me up in a hotel, and when I called to let my relatives know where I was and that I'd see them the next day, my unsuspecting uncle answered and said, "Wow, they really do have you traveling a lot with this job, don't they!"

BRUCE SWIECICKI
NATIONAL PROPANE GAS ASSOCIATION
TINLEY PARK, ILLINOIS

Well, this just happened this morning, but I promise you, I will never, ever, ever again program the coffee maker for 5:30 a.m. without making sure the coffee pot is where it is supposed to be.

LESLIE WOODWARD
FAIRVIEW FITTINGS
OAKVILLE, ONTARIO, CANADA

When my wife and I started Shasta Gas Propane 25 years ago, we should have called it 'Shoestring Propane.' We were totally underfunded. My mistake was inviting a 'vulture capitalist' in to help with funding. When I needed him to co-sign on a loan to buy a truck, he demanded to be a 50% co-owner. I did not agree to that. It took years to buy him out at a very substantial price. The only partners in the business now are the Lord, my wife and myself.

CHUCK KINNIE
SHASTA GAS PROPANE
SHASTA, CALIFORNIA

In the early 1980s, California banned the aftermarket conversion of motor vehicles to propane without any opposition from the propane industry. All the momentum we had made died that day. All conversion centers in California closed. Once the government takes something away, it's difficult to get it back.

JULIE JOHNSON
TED JOHNSON PROPANE
BALDWIN PARK, CALIFORNIA

If I were to relate this question to the past 12 months, I would not leave all my April gallons wide open without locking anything in — really bad decision this year! In life, I have been too trusting and a bit naïve at times. Although I still like to believe in people, I have become a bit more guarded.

JUDY TARANOVICH
PROCTOR GAS
PROCTOR, VERMONT

Never take for granted the value of proofreading. Sometimes the smallest mistakes can have the largest consequences. Even in a simple email, double-checking your spelling can sometimes mean the difference between a successful project and a doomed one.

When I was right out of college (at my first 'real job'), I was sending a final proposal to a very big client. This client had an apostrophe in her last name, and that apostrophe haunts me to this day because I did not include it in her email



address! Our proposal sat undelivered for three business days, and although the client was pleased with it, the delay sent ripple effects throughout the project. This is one mistake I will never make again. It is always a good idea to recheck names, addresses and content before pressing send on an email. You never know who may or may not receive it.

JESSICA JOHNSON
THOMPSONGAS
ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

One mistake I will never make again is to take my health for granted. I used to tell myself I was fine and would not have any problems. But once I saw how quickly issues appeared among family and friends, I changed my thinking. I want to try to stay healthy so I can enjoy life and all the new experiences that are out there.

ROSIE BUSCHUR
MCMAHAN'S BOTTLE GAS
DAYTON, OHIO

The first mistake that comes to mind is going through a divorce, but let's not go there! On the business side of things, I will never again work at a company with a toxic culture.

A company that I worked for in the past was acquired by a much larger company, and the new culture was unbearable. I, as well as many of my coworkers, left as quickly as we could, and we swore never to let ourselves return to a similar situation.

JASON SOULON
WESTMOR INDUSTRIES
SHAWNEE, KANSAS

I have made my share of mistakes, and I don't want to repeat any of them.

BOYD H. MCGATHEY
ENERGY DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS
PARKVILLE, MISSOURI

Jumping to a quick conclusion when you think you know all the facts. I have made more errors in judgment by not taking the time to research and do my due diligence to make sure I have all the information. Took me a lot of years to get this right, and I still struggle.

LAURIE IRISH-JONES
IRISH PROPANE
BUFFALO, NEW YORK

I will never take for granted that people see or hear the same thing I do. Too often I have believed that there was an obvious problem that other responsible parties could see, only to watch the problem go unresolved and grow into a larger issue than needed. If you see something, say something.

TONYA CROW
GROWMARK INC.
BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS

I frequently make the mistake of assuming that people have a clear understanding of a certain topic, subject or perspective I'm trying to convey based upon their knowledge, education and experience. I have discovered on numerous occasions throughout my life that my perception of an individual's understanding many times is different than the reality.

I have found that clear communication (both orally and in writing), the delivery mode or style, and the tone significantly

We are not always right, but being more informed will decrease the chances of making a bad decision.

impact what the listener hears, sees and interprets. That is why I am very careful with email correspondence and especially texting, which can be so easily misinterpreted or misunderstood. I'm better face to face and on my phone communicating with others!

JERRY SCHIMMEL
P3 PROPANE SAFETY
CUMBERLAND, RHODE ISLAND

The one mistake I will never make again is to not listen to the whole story. Whether it is a family, business or friendship discussion, it is important to understand what is being discussed. It is also important to listen with empathy.

If you do not listen carefully, you can easily misinterpret a comment or situation. It is very important in the business world to truly understand and listen to be able to make the right decisions.

We are not always right, but being more informed will decrease the chances of making a bad decision. I learned that lesson long ago.

ED VARNEY
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I can hope I don't make this mistake again and certainly try every day to not make it again. Early in my management career at RCC, I had just finished a management meeting where we discussed some upcoming changes to our company. I mentioned some of these potential changes to a staff member in my department, in confidence. Definitely my mistake — you can all see it coming! That employee then told another employee in a different department, and that department was going to be more affected by the change. That sure opened Pandora's Box.

It's a fine line knowing upcoming changes, but I've learned it's best to keep them to myself until all or most of the details are worked out. There are times that I have had to vary from this but tried to at least inform the department personnel that were affected before involving the rest of the staff. It's certainly one of the most difficult parts of management: striking a balance of getting our wonderful staff the right information at the right time. It is an area I feel I need to be aware of all the time.

SUSAN PETERSON
RURAL COMPUTER CONSULTANTS
BIRD ISLAND, MINNESOTA

WHAT WE LEARN

It's important to remember: On one level, like spilled coffee or missing a flight, we learn to focus better. On another level, we become aware of behaviors that we can work on improving. On yet another tier, we can find empathy for ourselves and others as we accept our own errors. Mistakes are not all bad.

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



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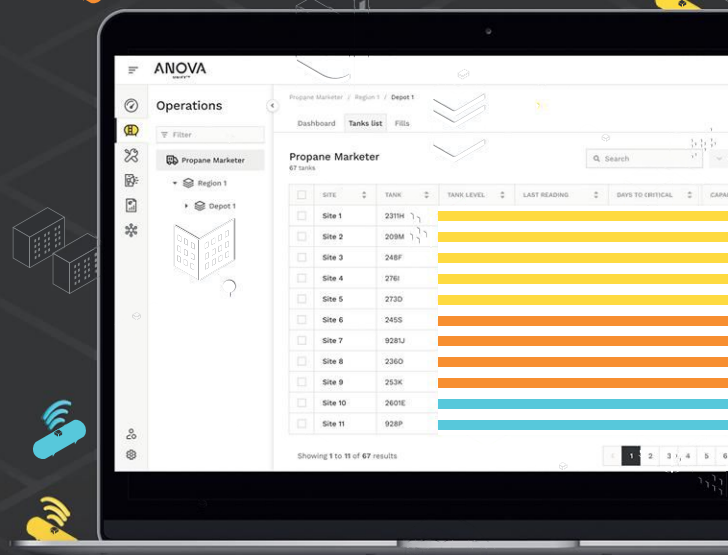

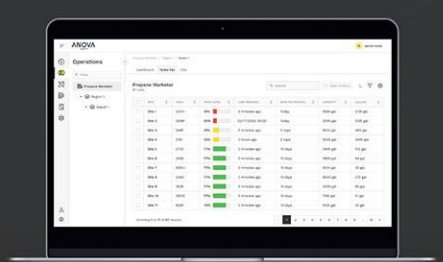

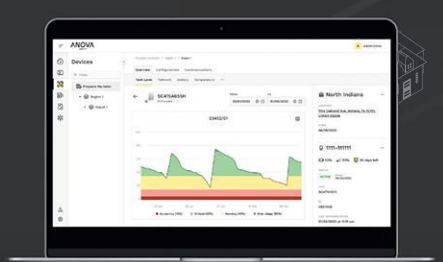

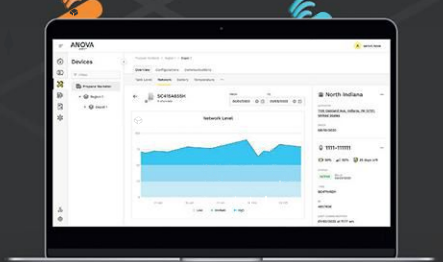

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David Stroupe is executive vice president of corporate development for EDP. He has more than 30 years of experience in the propane industry and has been personally involved with more than 100 acquisitions. He can be reached at 312-254-5954 or dstroupe@edplp.net. Visit edplp.net.

EXPERIENCED TEAMS EQUAL SMOOTH ACQUISITIONS

EDP's M&A strategy involves having the right team in place to support an expanded operation

There is no question that today's propane industry is experiencing consolidation. If propane business owners don't have a natural successor on their team as they near retirement age, they then begin to consider various options for an exit strategy. Of course, selling the business to a larger operation is a natural choice.

AN ONGOING HISTORY OF CONSOLIDATION

Although it may seem like there is more active consolidation taking place across the propane industry today, in reality, consolidation has been taking place for many years. In fact, there is approximately the same number of independent propane marketers in the United States today as there were 20 years ago. There has historically been about an equal number of entrepreneurs starting up propane companies to counter those exiting, especially with refined product marketers expanding into the propane space.

Because the Energy Distribution Partners (EDP) team has a number of long-time propane industry veterans on staff, we have been active in mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in the industry for many years. In fact, as industry veterans, both our CEO, Tom Knauff, and myself have each been involved with more than 100 acquisition transactions.

As a result, we've learned a thing or two about growing through acquisitions. So, for propane marketers considering the acquisition of a smaller operation — perhaps a nearby competitor — we strongly suggest you assess the capability of your team to support that acquisition.

ENSURE YOU CAN SUPPORT AN ADDITIONAL OPERATION

We have recognized since the company's inception that the team supporting our acquisition efforts must be talented, experienced and committed to our external growth objectives. You, too, will need a strong, seasoned team to make your acquisition a success. To ensure that is the case for us, over the past few years EDP has added a number of new positions, increasing our bench strength for our field operations in addition to providing support to our corporate development efforts. These positions include the following:

- *Field leadership team* — We've added regional vice president positions with an average of 25-plus years of industry experience. Even if the companies who join EDP have experienced team members remaining in place, they will likely need guidance during the integration process. These regional vice presidents make sure someone is there to help every step of the way.
- *Human resources* — The "people" part of a transaction is crucial, and we work hard to maintain the local culture of

The team supporting our acquisition efforts must be talented, experienced & committed to our external growth objectives. You, too, will need a strong, seasoned team to make your acquisition a success.

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NATIONAL PROPANE GAS ASSOCIATION





"No doubt the NPGA Cylinder Exchange Council has helped me grow in knowledge of the exchange business. Having relationships with technical and hands-on experts that are passionate for our industry is priceless"

-R. Doug Mann, Chair, MAKEEN Energy

"As a new participant of the NPGA Cylinder Exchange Council, it has been very valuable to our company in partnering with other industry leaders. It has helped us stay up to date on any new regulatory requirements that would impact this growing segment of business."

- Steve Derrick, Superior Plus Energy

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the acquired company. A seasoned human resource (HR) team plays an important role in that process. With our expanded HR team, led by an experienced vice president of HR, we do our best to help new employees acclimate to our insurance plans, employee benefit programs, payroll procedures and more.

- *Safety and training* — Safety must absolutely remain a top priority and cannot be overlooked during the transaction process. Accordingly, we added a director of safety and training to oversee these vitally important functions. Do not short-change the importance of having an experienced safety expert on your company's team. Having this person involved in the due diligence process (to ensure the company you plan to acquire is operating safely and has the necessary documentation in place), as well as the ongoing training of your expanded team, will be critical.
- *Supply and transportation* — Make sure you have a team member who truly understands supply and transportation and can ensure you have the propane you need, when you need it. We added a director of supply and logistics, and — given the volatility of these past three years — this position has been instrumental in making sure we have adequate supply and that it is in the right locations to best serve our customers.
- *Sustainability and marketing* — Given the growing importance of renewable fuels, the push for "electrifying everything" in California (including the proposed banning of propane forklifts and gas appliances) and similar initiatives starting in other states, as well as an increasing emphasis on environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues, we have recently added a vice president of sustainability strategies to our team. If you don't have someone on your team paying attention to these important industry issues, you could find yourself left behind and your business will suffer.
- *Corporate development* — Over the past three years, we've added two people to our corporate development team to ensure we can adequately address the industry's ongoing consolidation. One is a 25-year industry veteran who's been involved with more than 60 transactions. A second individual has 10 years of M&A experience. As a result, our team knows what is important for both the buyer and seller and understands the process.

Although we've added a number of professionals with important "day jobs" to our EDP team over the past few years, they have all become unofficial members of our corporate development team and play an integral role in our acquisitions efforts from beginning to end. We have developed a true working partnership between corporate development and our field/administration departments.

The bottom line? Before you decide to make an acquisition, make sure you have the capabilities to handle all facets of the transaction (pre-transaction, during and post-transaction) in addition to taking into account the impact on your core business.

It takes an experienced team to help a fellow propane marketer be confident that, should they be acquired, their legacy will live on, their employees will be well cared for, and their customers will receive the same commitment to safety and quality of service that the marketer personally delivered over the years.

Don't jump into an acquisition until you are confident you have a talented, experienced team in place to support both you and the expanded operation.

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HOW TO PIVOT YOUR PROPANE MARKETING GAME PLAN

Get ahead of industry curveballs by planning your marketing strategy now

BY JENNIFER LECLERC



So far, 2022 has come with its fair share of hurdles — and it's only spring! From unexpected weather patterns to fluctuating market prices, there are all kinds of curveballs that can affect your marketing strategy. So, if you're wondering how it is possible to plan ahead and stay on top of in-the-moment communications with your customers, we have you covered.

This article explores several marketing tips for pivoting your propane marketing strategy while staying true to your brand identity and company goals for the year.

SET YOUR GOALS FOR THE YEAR

If we're talking about pivoting in the moment, why worry about a plan in the first place? Identifying your company's goals for the year and setting a marketing plan to meet them is a best practice that will serve you well, no matter what comes your way. Whether your goals for 2022 are to acquire more customers in a specific town, increase your gallons or convert will-call customers to automatic delivery, identifying them ahead of time will help you stay focused when extenuating circumstances call for adjustments. It also helps to be clear on where you want to focus your efforts and advertising budget, including email marketing, website updates, search engine optimization (SEO) strategy, social media advertising, etc.

REACH CUSTOMERS QUICKLY & DIRECTLY

When something comes up that your customers need to know about right away — like an upcoming storm, a change to your delivery schedule or a spike in market prices — use the most direct method to keep them in the loop. You know your customers best. Where are they going to look for information?

Whether it's a message on their online account login, an email update or a social media post (or even all three), put something together that is informative, helpful and — most importantly — authentic. Customers respond positively and appreciate honest communication that is easy to access and understand.

5 STEPS TO A STRONGER STRATEGY:

1. Set goals for the upcoming year.
2. Reach customers quickly and directly with timely communication.
3. Keep employees updated on brand messaging adjustments.
4. Adjust messaging to reach new business targets.
5. Use your plan to your advantage when something changes.

GET EMPLOYEES ON BOARD

Speaking of where customers get their information, your office phone number is likely at the top of the list. If you need to adjust your marketing to address new circumstances, make sure your employees are updated on the issue and trained to answer customer questions.

For example, let's say you had to modify your delivery schedule due to staffing changes. Get a memo out to your team right away and make sure your customer service representatives are given information about the change and some suggestions on how to talk with customers who call with questions or concerns.

This will help your team work efficiently and give your customers information that is consistent with any other messages they will receive by phone or email, on their online portal, etc.

ADJUST MESSAGING TO TARGETS

Another important part of your marketing strategy is outreach to new targets. Typically, company-specific changes like a new delivery schedule won't need to be shared with targets, but if there are circumstances affecting the greater community, you will want to pivot your target marketing strategy as well.

USE YOUR PLAN TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

When you have a marketing plan in place, pivoting your strategy is actually easier than going back to the drawing board. Let's say you have a budget plan enrollment campaign planned for the summer.

You can adjust the message to align with concerns about fluctuating market prices. Use your regular marketing — like a monthly email campaign or weekly social media post — to get time-sensitive information out there.

If you've already identified how to best reach customers and/or targets, you can center your attention on creating a sincere and informative message. Plus, you can always repurpose marketing that you originally planned for a future campaign.

Set yourself up for success this year by developing a marketing plan that is both strategic and dynamic. You'll have all the tools you need to pivot when necessary, keep customers informed and stay aligned with your company goals and brand message.

Jennifer LeClerc is the creative director of Consumer Focus Marketing. She has more than 15 years of marketing experience and has been involved with the energy industry for the past nine years. She specializes in integrated marketing strategy. Visit consumerfocusmarketing.com.



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CYLINDER SAFETY 101: STAYING WELL-EQUIPPED & HAZARD-AWARE

AmeriGas director of safety compliance & training talks safe cylinder use & new compliance challenges

BY ELIZABETH MANNING



While handy and efficient, cylinders for consumer use also come with their own potential for hazard and injury. Making sure you stay compliant with the most recent regulations for propane cylinders requires constant vigilance. Below, Chris Wagner, director of safety compliance and training at AmeriGas, discusses some of the marketer's strategy for doing just that — including the company's standard for getting safety best practices to the consumer and how it helps drive safer cylinder use across the industry through involvement in associations. Read on to learn more.

Can you start by discussing any recent updates AmeriGas has made to its cylinder safety training program for employees?

AmeriGas training is ever evolving to accommodate the adult learner. AmeriGas conducts daily huddles to discuss relevant, real-time risks, weekly tailgates to drive our core value of safety and monthly safety meetings to refine our employees' skills. We perform annual refreshers in the areas of general awareness, safety, security and function-specific tasks. All training follows sound educational methodologies on multimedia platforms in multiple languages as needed, ensuring effective comprehension. When learning new tasks, our employees are first provided the material and expectations. The employee is then provided a visual demonstration of the task followed by hands-on learning and ending with an assessment of material covered.

What about updates to tips & best practices AmeriGas shares with its customers?

We regularly review and evaluate our packaging and labeling to assist and support the consumer. We are also an active participant in the Propane Education and Research Council (PERC), where our team supports the development and improvement of consumer safety information, warnings, brochures and web pages. AmeriGas labeling is Globally Harmonized System of Classifying and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS) compliant and contains a considerable amount of guidance and warning material. To further help the consumer, we have added safety webpage URLs and QR codes on cylinders, allowing the consumer to immediately find other formats of the same information regarding product safety, inspection points, proper connection and use, proper leak testing at time of connection, etc. We recognize that all consumers appreciate reading information in different formats and have worked diligently to accommodate all known formats.

What hazards do you see happening most often with consumers transporting & using cylinders during severe weather or in the

aftermath of natural disasters?

During periods of natural disaster, many consumers buy in preparation of the storm knowing that propane can be a lifesaver when the power is out. Knowing that you have an abundance of safe, reliable fuel during these tumultuous times allows families to relax in knowing that they will be able to cook, potentially heat, sterilize or provide backup power for their loved ones. This, however, does not change how the rules apply to the use of propane containers. When taking a cylinder or cylinders home, they must be transported upright, and a customer should never load cylinders into a closed body vehicle. Once home, the customer needs to store their containers outside and never use a propane cylinder inside of their home. Outdoor heating and cooking equipment is not meant for indoor use and could lead to carbon monoxide poisoning, asphyxiation, fire or other serious injuries.

How do you equip both your delivery teams & your branch locations to communicate those proper safety precautions with their customers?

AmeriGas cylinder sleeves, appliance owner's manuals, company-provided website links, QR codes and industry safety pages through propane.com are the best sources for the most accurate safety information related to consumer use of outdoor appliances and small cylinders. Our employees are well equipped with the knowledge that our container label is the best friend of the consumer and provides resources for more information, up to and including emergency contact information.

Does AmeriGas host safety events or training days specific to small tanks at any of its locations?

AmeriGas participates in emergency responder training nationally at accredited institutions and local community events. We are also actively working with PERC and the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) on the refresh of the "Propane Emergencies" curriculum to incorporate sound educational methodologies, improve the content, make it more versatile and available through housing on multiple platforms and gain National Pro-Board accreditation. The rollout of this new program will improve firefighter knowledge and capabilities in handling propane-related incidents of all sizes and sources.

What are the most significant challenges marketers currently face in terms of cylinder safety & exchange regulations?

The regulatory environment is constantly changing, and new legislation is proposed at various levels of government each year. The best way to remain on top of this ever-changing environment is to be engaged. Engagement can be through direct links to your local government, subscription to government notification systems, involvement in your state associations, involvement in the National Propane Gas Association and their committees, and involvement in PERC. As an industry, we have a significant number of resources to identify problematic rules and regulations, but it takes a village to affect change. Without the participation of all marketers, it is sometimes challenging to stop adverse rules from being instituted.



TOP TIPS FOR CONSUMER SAFETY & EMPLOYEE TRAINING

The best information available for consumer safety in using outdoor propane appliances and cylinders is to:

1. Read and follow the manufacturer's manuals and instructions.

2. Adhere to all use and testing recommendations, and if there is a question or they no longer have the information available, do a quick online search or call the customer service line for the company's particular appliance or container.

Propane is a safe, convenient and reliable fuel, but must be respected. Warnings are provided to protect the consumer and should be read, saved and periodically reviewed. For employee safety and performance, a robust and recurring safety training program is critical. Consider the following:

- **Behavioral safety observations** are a great tool for the evaluation of employee's knowledge, skills and adherence to company expectations.
- **Quality assurance programs** help ensure the product being released is desirable, safe and filled to company specifications.
- **Lastly, employee engagement** through safety committees is vital to learn of any issues, concerns or hardships that may be created by implemented processes. Only through the partnership of management and employees can internal processes be effectively improved.

Elizabeth Manning is the editor of Butane-Propane News.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NPGA CYLINDER EXCHANGE COUNCIL

A recap of recent wins & new areas of focus for council members in this industry segment

BY ELIZABETH MANNING

The National Propane Gas Association's (NPGA) Cylinder Exchange Council was founded in the 1990s with the goal of addressing issues that face propane cylinder exchange. If you review its track record, it's been a successful endeavor. Here are a few accomplishments, taken from the council's introduction letter:

- The council was instrumental in changing the International Fire Code requirements for cylinder cage separation distances from doors so the requirements would work congruently with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Code 58.
- It was successful in preventing the state of Wisconsin from forcing retailers to refund money for propane left in cylinders being exchanged (a regulation that, if adopted, would likely have spread to other states).
- It helped modify a proposal developed by the Joint Fire Service Committee that would prohibit the use of automated cylinder exchange cabinets — the results of which can be found in the 2012 International Fire Code.
- It initiated a research program aimed at developing technical information to allow more alternatives to the requirements in the fire code for protecting cylinder exchange cabinets from vehicle impact, resulting in favorable changes to NFPA 58 LP-Gas Code and the International Fire Code.

Currently comprised of 10 marketers, nine manufacturers and two distributors or service providers, the council provides a sounding board and serves as lead for issues related to the manufacture, distribution and sale of cylinders, cylinder cages and cylinder exchange programs. "When the council was started, the exchange business was in its infancy, and with my role in codes and standards, we kind of naturally gravitated toward that area of focus," said Bruce Swiecicki, P.E., senior technical advisor at NPGA.

Swiecicki noted the benchmarking focus present in other NPGA councils would have been difficult to replicate in this one, because the companies involved in this council work too closely in the same market segment. So, the council has played an instrumental role in the development and modification of codes and standards that would have a significant impact on the cylinder exchange market and its players.

Most recently, the council was one of several industry organizations writing letters and advocating for a change in policy in the state of New York during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As more restaurants moved to outdoor dining for its customers, propane provided these businesses a necessary service of outdoor heating during colder months.

With New York included in the list of states enacting legislation to ban the use of propane and move to electrification, the council joined groups fighting this action and, with the help of a new New York City mayor taking office, were successful in attaining a reprieve allowing the use of cylinders for outdoor heating in the city.

"In my mind, this is the importance of the cylinder exchange council — we are here to combat the misconceptions of propane cylinders and exchange programs to others who may not be as familiar with propane," said Steve Derrick, national account manager at Superior Plus Energy Services. "We can … say, 'Hey, this is a problem, and here's what we should do instead.' And provide the facts and a counter-solution for it that works for everyone."

Currently, the council is focused on a number of trends and challenges

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affecting cylinders, particularly the updating of NFPA 58 and its requirement for inspecting face seals on cylinder valves and the efforts by the National Institute of Standards and Technology to collect data on cylinder tare weights.

Outside of these issues, the industry is still adjusting to the influx of new customers for outdoor, residential use caused by pandemic lifestyle changes. Doug Mann, vice president of operations at Makeen Energy, said the average grilling customer has gone from having one or two cylinders at their home at any given time to now keeping two to four because of increased consumption.

"This pulled the cylinders out of our refurbishing plants; it pulled them out of the trucks delivering them at a faster rate; and it pulled them out of the cages. The industry is still trying to get caught up to that level of production," Mann said.

Mann said while this happens, the council is also trying to forecast what this trend will do when the pandemic comes to an end. Will these lifestyle changes be permanent? Or will we see an influx of cylinders back into the cages and the refurbishing plants?

"It's really been a tricky environment to navigate, especially because some of these larger exchange people had national contracts with large companies and quotas they have to fill. This left some of the smaller companies to fill in the gaps for the average consumer," Mann said.

Supply chain constraints and material challenges are also an issue to getting cylinders made and where they need to go according to market demand. However, Mann mentioned that while getting the materials themselves was an issue earlier on in the pandemic for manufacturers, what a lot of companies are seeing now is more of a logistics issue.

"... We are working on large projects and seeing parts we need held up at port and waiting for clearance. And then once that happens, then it's an issue of logistics — there is a driver shortage and then costs and wages are increasing, which trickles down to us," Mann said.

As the industry continues to navigate these uncertain waters, Mann and Swiecicki both mentioned the council's goal to add several member companies involved in cylinders for forklift use.

"This is an area of growth for our segment of the market, and we'd like to get some of those players involved," Swiecicki said. "There's going to be a lot of codes and regulatory issues that accompany the industrial use case as it grows, and we want to be proactive about planning for them."

Interested in getting involved with the Cylinder Exchange Council? The council is comprised of NPGA members who actively participate or are interested in the cylinder exchange segment of the industry. Email Swiecicki at bswiecicki@npga.org to learn more.

Elizabeth Manning is the editor of Butane-Propane News.

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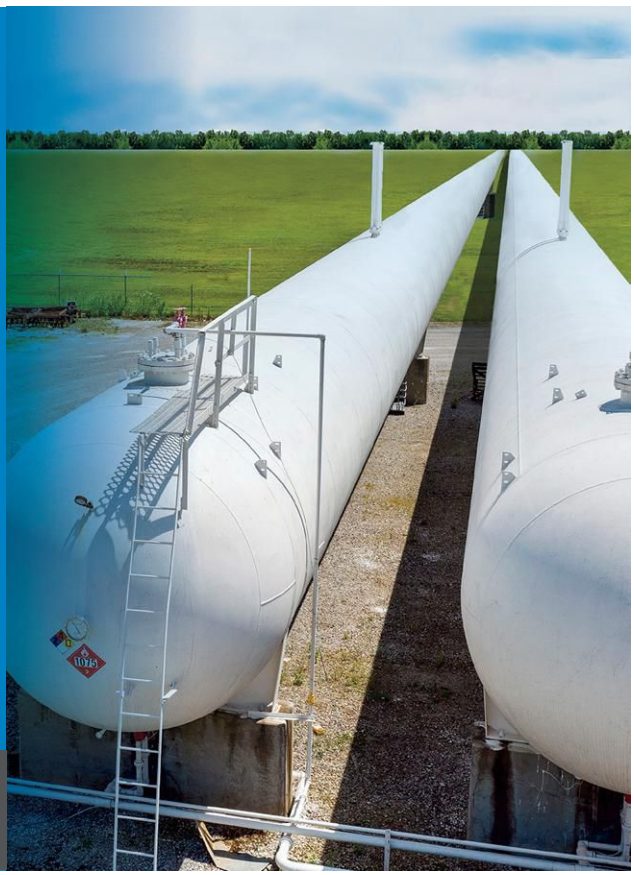





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WiP 2022
BPN Women in Propane

Diversity, equity and inclusion. Over the past decade, these three words have become a major focus of business leaders no matter the industry. And while many companies are making great strides toward manifesting a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce, we still have a lot of room to improve. The propane industry is no exception, and part of that crusade involves the advancement of women. In the following pages, hear from three companies — RegO, Ferrellgas and Boston Environmental — on their strategies for furthering DE&I in their own workplaces, as well as how they take that from an internal focus to the industry and beyond.

This section is sponsored by

BLUE PEAK RESOURCES

What Happens When Employees Walk the Company DE&I Talk

How the women of propane are driving the industry toward cultural agnosticism

BY RACHEL FULFORD CROSBY

While "diversity," "equity" and "inclusion" (DE&I) are certainly human resource (HR) buzzwords in 2022, they are not new market terms or ideals. During his time in office, President Ronald Reagan implemented affirmative action goals that helped women and people of color gain access to equal housing and voting rights, as well as greater business opportunities.

But, without clear, practical steps to achieving these goals long term, they were ultimately sidelined, and research by Robert Putnam, laid out in his book "The Upswing" (2020), shows that inequality in the United States has steadily worsened since Reagan's affirmative actions were abandoned.

In fact, writes Putnam, U.S. black and minority Americans currently have the lowest level of equity they have seen since the 1970s, based on measures of education, income, home ownership and future outlook. But 2020 was a call to action of sorts. With social and economic issues exacerbated and pushed to the forefront by a turbulent U.S. presidential season and a global pandemic disproportionately affecting women and minorities, business leaders are increasingly taking into their own hands what the federal government has yet failed to do — create equity in the marketplace — with Fortune 500 companies like Target in the lead.

Still, it's slow going. According to The HR Institute's study "The Future of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion 2022," only about 25% of companies who report a focus on DE&I have initiatives in place that could be deemed "mature," with only 40% offering DE&I training to all employees.

The study also states, "Roughly half (54%) of respondents agree or strongly agree their organization's corporate culture is more inclusive than it was two years ago. However, slightly fewer indicate their workforce reflects the demographics of today's marketplace (45%), and about the same say their workforces are more diverse than two years ago (48%).

Yet, more than three-quarters of respondents say it is important to "work at an organization that prioritizes diversity and inclusion." While the DE&I onus ultimately lies on policy, many underrepresented employees are finding ways toward true inclusion through their own means — and one such example is the women of the propane industry.

Show 'Em What You've Got

Prospective male employees are generally evaluated based on their education or relevant experience, but often women must go beyond their credentials, proving themselves capable before garnering a company's true trust in their abilities, making it more difficult for women to land leadership roles.

According to The HR Institute, "About half of HR professionals say women represent no more than 40% of people managers, and a fifth say women are no more than 20% of people managers."

The statistics for women of color are even more staggering. A study by Perceptyx, "Elevating Equity: The Real Story of Diversity and Inclusion," notes that only three of the companies currently on Forbes' Fortune 500 list are led by a black CEO and there have only ever been two female black CEOs in this category.

The glass ceiling can be thick in male-dominated industries like propane, but some women making strides in the industry believe the first step is showing up and showing out anyway.

Emily Harrell, director of product management at RegO Products (manufacturer of valves and flow controls for the production, storage and transport of industrial gases, cryogenic fluids and alternative fuels), says, "I think companies need to have a good balance of both internal and broader, industrywide DE&I promotion and involvement to ensure that women are not left behind in either the company or the industry."

For Harrell, DE&I initiatives are just the beginning — a vessel of opportunity for women in the industry — but taking agency over those new avenues and owning the role is an inside job.

"The industry is giving us an opportunity [now]," she adds. "It's up to each individual person to prove themselves. I do feel as a woman I've had to go a little further and harder to prove myself quicker, just because I don't want to be viewed differently. But once I prove myself, for me there is no issue with gender or background."

"No matter your gender, race, ethnicity or even education," Harrell continues, "once you prove that you are a valued contributor, then you are — or at least should be — recognized for that."

Her colleague, Peini Spinazzola, senior marketing manager for RegO, feels similarly. Spinazzola states, "I think, in reality, there's no industry or environment that can ensure DE&I. I think it's on us — how we prove we have the ability and the skill to perform that job. Yes, we are asking for equality, but at the same time, we need to make sure we are stepped up to everyone else, not just because we are women, so we need to be treated differently."

For Spinazzola, the proof of belonging is in action. Initiatives may open the door, but real elbow grease used to squeak out better results is how women take their seat at the table. "With a different background and life experiences, you definitely bring different tools when handling situations, providing more productive and proactive solutions."

Why Tech Could Be the Great Equalizer

As the propane industry has evolved along with technology in general, increasingly more positions open that do not involve work in dirt-filled environments or the heavy lifting required for fuel delivery and service. While some women are certainly capable of filling such physically demanding positions, it is less common for them to desire or seek out such work, and tech positions often help fill in the hiring gap.

"Thirty, 40 years ago, there weren't many tools they could use to communicate and educate a new customer," says Spinazzola. "And when it comes to the product, it's all about hands on, which requires a rough environment. So, I think, naturally, propane is not really a typical [industry where] women would be involved. But in today's world, that's not the case. We don't have to be in a dirt-pile to educate customers on how to use a product. I think this empowers women getting into a different industry with a different skill set. I don't have to [not] be involved if I cannot lift 50 pounds."

With the increase of technologies that allow for the virtual demonstration of products, as well as continued automation of machinery and a growing need for engineers, the propane industry is opening to less able-bodied persons and those who long for a work environment not directly in contact with the gases and fluids that are the market's bread and butter. On this topic, Harrell says, "In general, times have changed, even since I was in college. I'm a chemical engineer, and I was one of the few women sitting at the table (literally) in class. I have seen that dynamic change. Over the years, more and more women have been going into disciplines related to science, technology, engineering and math."



Similarly, the increased push for alternative fuel sources and methods by which to harness them usher in a new generation of minds — a generation bent on workplace and broader-spectrum ideals of DE&I — and pooling together these new minds is crucial for the evolution of such ideals and their ultimate fruition.

Mentorship Matters

Mentorship programs are an important tool for furthering DE&I at any company, and the propane industry is wielding it. The National Propane Gas Association's (NPGA) Women in Propane Council offers a knowledge exchange mentorship program to all NPGA members. Mentees fill out profiles and are paired with qualified mentors via matching software. Partners meet for two hours a month over a six-to-12-month period, during which the goal is to share relevant industry knowledge and experiences.

It is in programs like these that not only industry-specific information can be exchanged, but struggles, advice, questions and plans for new initiatives can be hashed out as well.

According to Qooper, a mentorship software producer, "Mentorship programs are a great way to align employees toward common goals and help them recognize their differences and overcome them as they work towards a project."

And mentorship programs that target underrepresented groups, like Women in Propane's knowledge exchange, give mentees "a chance at identifying their career goals within the organization, develop their qualifications and competencies and to get ready to take the next step in their career on their way to diversifying senior leaders in the organization." Harrell and Spinazzola agree.

"I think [the mentorship program] is great to help ensure that people are learning from each other's experiences and helping [one another]. A big part of the program is not just women in the industry, but younger people. So [it's about] helping coach them and making sure that they're ready to take over," says Harrell.

Spinazzola adds, "The program provides mentorship to young professionals, or those new to the industry, which I think is definitely a good start. In the future, we should have different industry people to join this mentorship. It's not just about [those working directly with] propane. It could be people in IT, marketing, people management, project management, etc. I think, especially for the young generation, it's quite important."

Ideally, as time goes on and mentees turn into mentors, more women and people of color will take seats at the proverbial and literal leadership tables. Then DE&I policies can be created by those who truly know what matters, what works and what doesn't, and what is required to ensure the planning and implementation of organizational practices that bring about more diversity and maximize its advantages.

What This Means for Business

But, besides the fulfillment of fostering an inclusive environment and, in turn, happy employees, the real business advantage of mature DE&I programs nudging industries to get moving is profit.

The HR Institute's findings make a strong case for increasing practical, companywide DE&I initiatives — 57% of respondents agree that initiatives gave enhanced organizational performance; 52% report improved compliance; 64% report enhanced mission visions and values — all metrics that pay dividends when increased.

Similarly, Perceptyx reports these businesses are 1.6 times more likely to exceed financial targets, 1.6 times more likely to satisfy and retain customers, 3.1 times more likely to effectively adapt to change, and 2.9 times more likely to innovate successfully.

Of course, the truth behind these stats is not lost on those who are the driving force behind the research. "Diversity matters. There's an increasing amount of research and information focused on the value of diversity, and more leaders are catching on to it. When women become leaders, they provide a different set of skills and experience that drive effective solutions," says Harrell.

The path to a truly diverse and equitable industry isn't straight. It will take trial and error, constant data mining, additional employee training (from the top down), as well as regular check ins with employees to gauge the effectiveness of current programs, incentives and policies.

It will demand systemic cultural shifts and many, many years to reach mastery. And even then, the work can never stop. But finding ways toward this goal is a challenge many women in the propane industry, including Spinazzola, are up for: "We are in a constantly changing marketplace, and the best way to gain a competitive advantage is through diversifying the workforce in companies and organizations.

"It can start with helping women obtain leadership positions, encouraging change in the boardroom, and inviting female leaders to join the conversation," said Spinazzola.

Rachel Fulford Crosby is freelance writer and editor and stay-at-home mom. In her spare time, she can be found listening to true crime podcasts and playing mixologist. Crosby lives with her husband and daughter in Birmingham, Alabama.



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Michelle Wilson: Propane Rookie to Industry Champion

One industry leader's journey from an internship to a workforce development leader

BY KARLI STEMPEL HAIGHT

If you meet Michelle Wilson at a board meeting, on a video chat over Zoom or at a trade show, it only takes a few minutes to see her passion for the propane industry. Once you get to talking, it's even clearer. She's a marketing and financial consultant, active community member and workforce development organizer — and those are just a few of the many hats you'll find her wearing on any given day.

Wilson's career in the propane industry started off as happenstance. After graduating from the University of New Hampshire with a degree in accounting and finance, she began an internship in the accounting department of Boston Environmental LLC in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Boston Environmental serves propane marketers with financial consulting, marketing and risk management services.

On the accounting team, Wilson began to learn the ins and outs of how propane companies conducted their businesses. Over time, she worked her way up to controller at Boston Environmental, and as she started to work more closely with propane marketers, she was gradually drawn out from behind the desk and into the field.

Wilson's transition from accounting to sales in 2009 was a natural one. She is a true people person and thrives in an environment where she can connect with others. Wilson will admit she was still a little nervous at her first trade show, but she quickly found the propane industry to be a dynamic and supportive environment, willing to welcome new professionals. She never looked back.

After that first trade show, things kept rolling. Wilson took every opportunity to attend propane industry events and meet marketers across the Northeast and, eventually, the country.

"I was so fortunate to meet so many incredible people that have motivated me," she said. "I am grateful to have had industry leaders take me under their wing, like Judy Garber, Bob Boltz and Dan Holohan. Through their mentorship, I was able to grow and learn so much."

For the past 11 years as vice president at Boston Environmental, Wilson's focus has been helping her clients in the propane industry grow their businesses. Her expertise has expanded from accounting and financial consulting to include propane marketing strategy and risk mitigation. And, thanks to many years of stopping into the offices of her clients, catching up with the staff and observing employee training, she has a sharp understanding of what it takes to run a business in the propane industry.

Wilson is an active member of many state and national propane gas associations, including serving as the membership chair of the Women in Propane Council, the membership chair of Women in Energy, and serving on the board of directors for the Pennsylvania Propane Gas Association and the New England Fuel Institute. So, you might be wondering, what exactly is it about the propane industry that turned Wilson's original internship into a lasting career?

"I sort of stumbled my way into this industry, but what hooked me and keeps me coming back for more is the industry's core values," Wilson said. "I get to work with a network of highly talented individuals, and every day is a different opportunity to problem solve, build relationships and evolve."

One of Wilson's recent passion projects is workforce development to secure the next generation of propane professionals. Like many others, she knows all too well how retiring employees and the national hiring shortage has affected propane businesses all over the United States.

"Nearly every company I work with has had — and is having — a tough time finding new talent," she says. "It's a challenge

that isn't going away and requires attention and action now."

In 2019, Wilson played an integral role in establishing GeneratioNext Propane Pros, a workforce development program committed to helping propane marketers find qualified job candidates through local trade, commercial driver's license (CDL) and vocational schools. Today, state associations across the country use this program, and hundreds of marketers and applicants use the online platform to post and apply for jobs.

Wilson leads the program's student and marketer outreach, traveling to CDL and trade schools to highlight the benefits of a career in the propane industry.

At every presentation, she brings a representative from a local propane company with her so the students and instructors can hear firsthand success stories from the industry, learn about various career paths and meet with potential employers.

These outreach sessions are not only great for the students, but they also allow propane marketers a unique opportunity to meet with potential candidates and build relationships with schools to fill internships, apprenticeships and full-time employment positions. In 2020, GeneratioNext Propane Pros partnered with another workforce development program, Vets2Techs, to further expand their reach to help propane marketers find even more qualified applicants within the veteran community, bringing the industry the most comprehensive workforce development program.

"I'm excited to see how far we've come with workforce development and how much more we can do," Wilson said. "A lot of students and their instructors have little-to-no knowledge of the propane industry and all the opportunities it has to offer. Going into a classroom, I am able to show them that there aren't just jobs available — there are careers with competitive pay, valuable benefits and real opportunities for them."

When Wilson is not traveling to meet with students and instructors, she works directly with state association leaders and propane marketers to support their hiring and employee retention efforts.

"It's fulfilling to help the same network of people that welcomed me with open arms to find employees that aren't just qualified, but excited and driven to join the propane industry."

Karli Stempel Haight is the content marketing manager for Consumer Focus Marketing. Visit consumerfocusmarketing.com.





Taking Care of Business: One Marketer's Strategy

Ferrellgas leaders discuss the challenges of improving DE&I in the propane industry

BY ELIZABETH MANNING



Jill Rhoades, vice president of production at Ferrellgas, comes from a family of three daughters. According to her, all three of them are strong, confident, independent and capable.

"That's in part due to our dad, the first man we were ever around, and our mom, who never put a qualifier in front of anything we wanted to do or did in our lives. My experience is not everyone's experience — I realize that. But it should be," she said.

But that upbringing helped create a mindset she shares with several other women who take up leadership positions within the Ferrelgas team — the female perspective is a valuable one.

"One of the things I tell younger women is that the female perspective can be so different from the male perspective, and that's so important. The men I've worked with — they get that, and they want that," Rhoades said. Male or female aren't the only qualifiers that indicate value, though.

"Equality means everything. It doesn't matter if we're talking about male or female, young or old, northern or southern, etc. Every viewpoint is important to have at the table and should be considered," Rhoades said. "You have a better solution for customers, processes or even a workforce if you have diverse and equal viewpoints at the table. It's a two-way street — the viewpoints have to be [present] and once they are, they have to be listened to."

Lisa Zuppas, senior director of strategic initiatives, agrees, saying it's not just the right thing to do — it's good for business. "To me, diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) means bringing people that have been underrepresented or marginalized not only into our industry, but into our collaborative decision-making processes. We all win when we have multiple points of view contributing to final outcomes," Zuppas said.

And the need for a continued focus on DE&I is more present than ever before. In a survey of industry companies conducted by BPN and Anova in early 2022, 48% of respondents said driver, service tech and general labor shortages affected their businesses the most in 2021. These shortages persist in 2022. Zuppas said growing an inclusive workforce creates a team that is better set to take on future challenges.

"With a shrinking labor pool, we improve our talent search by actively recruiting into all segments of the labor market. If we have diversity of thought on our teams, we will have more insights into innovative solutions to the challenges we face," Zuppas said. "We better represent what our customers look like when we have diversity in our workforce."

So, what's in the Ferrellgas strategy for DE&I? Megan Sharp, vice president of operations, said one important facet of it is continued learning. "By investing in all the company's employees, we are giving developmental opportunities to everyone through our consistent online education. Our extensive training environment, coupled with mentee/mentor opportunities, is critical to growth," she said.

To eliminate bias from its hiring processes, Sharp noted that the company uses a panel when interviewing candidates for certain positions. The panel allows the company to gather input from a pool of hiring managers and gives all candidates

an opportunity to meet several employees. Structured scoring during the interview process helps resist groupthink from occurring as well. After the employee is hired, the company's flexible working strategy allows the team to leverage employee contributions in a work-from-home environment.

"We are able to bring on and retain the best and brightest talent from around the country," Sharp said. "The decentralization of department locations has proven to bring us closer together and provide experience in many different areas. We also service all states, and this gives us an opportunity to realize talent in local markets."

This approach is especially important to creating a successful company, says Tamria Zertuche, chief operating officer at Ferrellgas and the World LPG Association's Woman of the Year for 2021.

"Diversity of thought creates an opportunity for innovation, bold solutions and sound critical reasoning," Zertuche said. "However diverse your team may be, inclusion is truly at the center of success. Ignorance may be its greatest barrier. It is through open-mindedness, learning, trust-filled collaboration and challenging the status quo that ignorance is overcome."

In her role, Zertuche promotes an organizational mindset in which knowledge to be gained from relationships, new experiences and challenging opportunities are placed above the goal of singular performance.

Determine Your Purpose

Regardless of what level of the business someone is in or the role they are filling for a company, it's important to determine what motivates them to grow. For Rhoades, it's important to her to identify her purpose. "There were times when that purpose was paying the bills. There were times when it was a work-life balance that allowed more time for taking care of kids and [investing] in my family. My passions have always been processes, efficiency, organization and continuous improvement, and those are definitely motivators — whether met inside my career or outside of it," Rhoades said.

The past few years have only made identifying this purpose more difficult — especially for women in the workforce. In 2020, significantly more women than men left the workforce as families were forced to make tough decisions regarding childcare, caregiving for sick family members and more. This environment makes the need for a supportive, open-minded team ever more important as people navigate challenges in their personal lives, too.

"My own path to leadership at Ferrellgas started when I was juggling the pursuit of an MBA, raising a family and ascending the ranks of leadership," Zertuche said. "I know my career success is directly related to the collaborative and supportive nature of my coworkers. While they may have varied in gender, age, race and religion, they were steadfast in their support of me and each other."

The End Goal Takes Hard Work

And it involves creating a seat for everyone at the table. Zertuche is proud to say that at the heart of the company are teams of high-performing professionals who care about the customer, enjoy working together and strive to be operationally excellent and strategic in growth — and these teams are made stronger by the cognitive diversity present.

But this doesn't happen by chance. Zertuche references the sourcing efforts of the Ferrellgas talent acquisition team, the ability to onboard key talent and the inclusive culture of the company that is consistently focused on investing in and promoting internal talent.

"... Forty percent of the senior leadership team at Ferrellgas is women. This was not achieved by placing a numbers-based goal for women in leadership. It was achieved by choosing the most talented professional for the role every time," she said.

And while Zertuche, Rhoades, Zuppas and Sharp all speak positively about their experiences with inclusion both in the industry and at Ferrellgas, they note the industry still has work to do on a broader level to create access and roles for everyone.

"... Just talking about challenges will not make the change; we need action and commitment by top leaders and managers at all levels," Sharp said.

Zuppas echoed this, saying the propane industry will become more attractive for underrepresented groups when individual companies and leaders become intentional about the process. "It doesn't start and end with recruiting. Peer support, meaningful mentoring and role models are important. And a culture of respect and support must be expected from team members and direct supervisors in the field and modeled by leadership. We must have zero tolerance [as an industry] for sexual harassment and any type of discrimination. Clear career paths that reward performance and talent for all employees make the industry attractive overall," Zuppas said.

Wondering how to get started with improving DE&I in your own company? Sharp says a great first step is getting the entire team on board with your vision for the future.

"Communicate to the entire organization what your company priorities are and find a way to get everyone involved. The more people [can] contribute, the more they become vested in what really matters," Sharp said.

Elizabeth Manning is editor of Butane-Propane News.



PROMOTING PROPANE'S CAREER POTENTIAL TO INCUMBENT LEADERS

The attributes of the industry that subvert expectations & attract a diverse workforce

BY JESSICA GRAHAM

At its core, workforce development is about focusing on the people of the industry through recruitment, training and retention. Without the people who keep the engine going, our industry would stall.

I've been a member of the propane world for a little less than a year now, and one thing that has stood out to me the most is the commitment to the people who keep that engine running smoothly — even in the face of ongoing labor challenges. Not only do industry events feel like reunions of people who genuinely enjoy being together, but I've also noticed a continual investment in and appreciation of the workforce.

I met with Bridget Kidd, senior vice president, industry relations for the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), to discuss the propane workforce and why it's a great industry for people of all backgrounds to make a career out of. With her bird's-eye view of the industry from her position at PERC, Kidd sees how propane draws people in.

"I think the common denominator is people who want to work. The people who want to be proud of the companies they work for and really represent those companies would be very successful in this industry," Kidd said. "And it doesn't matter how old you are. It doesn't matter the color of your skin. It doesn't matter what gender you are. There could be a place for somebody who wants to be really ingrained in an industry and really represent the company they work for."

A COMMON MISCONCEPTION VS. REALITY

It's not uncommon for someone outside the propane industry to view it as a rural, male-dominated field. This is understandable, given that it traditionally has been. But with a widening field of opportunities, the industry continues to open itself to people from different backgrounds.

This is a huge hook to encourage people to choose this career path. Despite the rural perception of the industry, Kidd explained, as soon as you go one question deeper, people realize that propane is a source of energy all around them.

"We see this all the time with community colleges, and they're very familiar with propane. It's not a rural fuel to them. It's, of course, 'Every development I build is on propane,'" Kidd said.

THE FUTURE OF THE WORKFORCE

How can propane marketers and job recruiters help people see the propane industry as a viable career path? It's

about getting the word out, whether through job boards, partnering with local colleges or attending job fairs.

PERC hosts a landing page with links to association and industrywide job boards, a popular spot to be viewed by someone deep in the job search. A more proactive approach is to meet people where they are.

"There's also a really big opportunity partnering with community colleges and commercial driver's license schools and even technical high schools. Those groups are really craving employers being engaged with their students," Kidd said. "And at PERC, we have a technical school grant program, so we're giving funding to technical schools to build labs. There are opportunities for marketers or any employee within the [company] to be the advocate or on their advisory panel."

The industry is seeing a lot more women and younger people of diverse backgrounds engaged at technical schools. And through paths like this, more and more people are adding their perspectives to an industry that is poised for growth. Growth and longevity are important factors in workforce recruitment — things this industry is primed for, according to Kidd.

"I think that it's a career ... and not just a job. There's a trajectory you could go on to constantly be improving and moving up, earning more, learning more, becoming more marketable yourself. And I think that's appealing — especially to younger people, but also to people who are looking to advance their economic situation or are looking to change their own marketability," Kidd said. "People want to start a career where they know it's going to be around for a while."

THE APPEAL OF A COMMUNITY

Beyond a career, what are all people looking for in life? A sense of community, belonging and acceptance. The strength of the propane community can be both a major selling point to a new recruit and a way to hold on to employees for the long term. Kidd commented on the sense of community she sees when she attends an industry event or trade show.

"It's a lot of deep-rooted friendships, but no one's limited by their length of career in the industry. If you're new, [people in this industry are] just as excited to see you as they are the person they've been seeing at every summer meeting. They're business associates, of course, and everyone's looking toward the same future. And they're competitors, too, but they're really friends and they want to see each other be successful. And I think ... if you're new, you're not on the outside. They're very happy to extend that circle to as many people as they can [reach at any given time]."

Jessica Graham is associate editor of Butane-Propane News.

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TRUCK SOLUTION TECHNOLOGY & THE ROAD TO MORE EFFICIENT DELIVERIES

How handheld & mobile devices have changed the propane industry's field strategy

BY FREDDIE RIDLER



I often wonder how much more time I would have had 10 years ago if I had the technology we have today. Ten years doesn't really seem like that long ago, but it can be hard to wrap your mind around how much technology has changed. Let me help with that. Let's examine this in reference to truck technology.

A decade ago, drivers didn't depend on a truck solution. They were doing what they had been doing for the last 50 years: stop, pump, stamp, write and drive to the next location. I can remember when Rural Computer Consultants (RCC) was approached with the concept of adding a truck solution to our software. As exciting as it all seemed, we were a little nervous about it. How would drivers react? Back-office software can do a lot for companies inside the office, but what could we really do to help the drivers? I imagine any software company out there that is now supplying a solution asked themselves that same question.

Giving companies technology on the road has opened so many avenues for them. For example, speeding up the delivery process, providing customer information at drivers' fingertips, tracking drivers' productivity and so much more. However, making them feel comfortable enough to trust this new technology has proven to be a bigger challenge.

Drivers are no longer handwriting tickets with prices, taxes, terms, contracted gallons, etc. Everything is calculated from the mobile device, allowing drivers to do what they are hired to do, and that is to pump gas and build relationships with their customers. If we increase the speed per delivery and decrease the human error in manual calculations, this only creates a higher efficiency. This also gets drivers home earlier to be with their families and can reduce costs for the propane company due to late deliveries.

RCC has heard firsthand how drivers are thanking their managers for allowing them to be home with their families because of optimized delivery loads and technology in the trucks that make their jobs more efficient. It's great to hear the stories that come from drivers when you pair a handheld with a mapping solution.

Using truck technology allows the mobile device to communicate directly with the register. RCC uses MOGO (Mobile Office on the GO) to grab the totalizer readings, so drivers are not having to key in the gallons pumped. By doing this, the mobile device will calculate on the invoice as well as reconcile how many gallons were pumped versus invoiced, which is a key feature in keeping employees honest. This can be a subject no one wants to talk about, but having a truck solution that captures totalizer readings, times and locations of the pump can exponentially decrease the ability for anyone to pilfer. A mobile device can also help troubleshoot the register by letting the driver know why it's not pumping. If the mobile device is already talking to the register, then why not let the register talk to the mobile device?

Mobile devices give the drivers information at their fingertips. A decade ago, drivers had to call the office to check for addresses, phone numbers, gate codes, location of tanks and so on. Being on the phone with drivers prevents office staff from taking calls from customers. Think about what you would do if someone took your cell phone away from you. Would you know your own sibling's phone number? This is how dependent we are on technology.

It's important for a dispatcher and driver to be in constant communication. It's a common request from dispatchers to know the location of their drivers. Before mobile solutions, they would be sitting in the office taking a call from a customer that needed a fill. The dispatcher would have to call the drivers to see where they were or remember who was on what route.

With technology in the trucks, they can see where the drivers are throughout the day. With some real-time communications software, dispatchers can see where the drivers are on the map and which driver is closest to the location of the caller.

It's no secret that drivers on call love having technology in their trucks. Think back to when a driver would get a call from a customer at night or on a weekend. It was impossible for that driver to know every detail about each customer. Do they owe money? How aged are their balances? When was the last delivery? When was the last payment made? The driver would have to contact someone just to get the information needed to make a delivery. This is no longer a problem with mobile devices in trucks, as this is just some of the information drivers can now access directly.

It comes down to convenience, and companies are seeing these benefits firsthand with their mobile devices. RCC has found over the last few years that having a truck solution has proven to be beneficial for more than just drivers. We keep hearing that companies are getting attacked by ransomware. We know that, too often, companies trust that data backups are there if they need them, but unfortunately this is not always the case. We've had companies that had to restore using a six-month-old backup.

Without a truck solution with all the batches backed up on a server, they might have lost changes made to customers' accounts, locations and prices. Instead they had backup of all the sales and payments that were done with their truck solution. You really don't expect an attack to happen to you until it's too late; having a truck solution tied into your data gives you one more option if you find yourself going through this.

Having access to your information is vital to continue forward after an attack, but have you thought about what you would do during the attack? The world keeps moving, and if this were to happen during winter, customers would still need access to gas.

When companies affected by ransomware attacks are in the middle of dealing with restoring their data and their servers are down, office staff are still getting calls and can use their tablets to look up customer information. This was a big discussion at a recent National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) Benchmarking Council Meeting: What do we do if we lose internet or power? A backup option is something that



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companies should have these days with all the attacks that are happening.

Whether you are talking about phones, computers, apps or mobile solutions, this new technology can be scary. The phrase, "it's hard to teach old dogs new tricks," is often spoken when introducing this new technology. Drivers who have been delivering propane by handwriting tickets for more than 30 years can find this new technology to be daunting.

Though in RCC's experience, after a few months of seeing firsthand how a truck solution can change how they do their jobs, these drivers are the first to say, "You can have this device back when I am dead." They can see how user friendly a mobile solution can be and how it can truly make them more efficient.

Over the last few years dealing with COVID-19, it's hard not to wonder where we would have been without technology. It became even more vital to keep your business running despite all the uncertainties. COVID-19 is still happening, and as companies are now struggling to find qualified help, we've found a key component to efficiency is having turn-by-turn directions on a mobile device. You can now hire new drivers and they can feel comfortable taking on a new job knowing they have in their hands the means to get to the next delivery location.

The training and onboarding time for new hires has drastically decreased with the implementation of intuitive truck solutions. This is an important topic in today's market and with the ever-changing age of drivers. We no longer depend on drivers knowing every customer on their route in order to be a contributing employee.

One final trend we have seen from over the last 10 years and how having a truck solution has helped shape the future of delivering is having a routing and optimizing software that is paired up with the truck's technology. The driver is out making the delivery, but how was that order put together? Are we hitting an optimal drop size? Are we delivering on time? Am I passing another driver? Having this piece in the back office only helps with the stress of the questions listed above.

We are in a new era of technology. We must jump into the wave of new advances or be swept away by it. Contact your software provider and ask them about technology inside and outside of the trucks to help guide your company through your next heating season.

Freddie Ridler is the business growth manager and marketing at Rural Computer Consultants Inc. Ridler has been with RCC since 2005 and has worn many hats with the company. He was also one of the four established architects of MOGO, the company's real-time communication system. Contact Ridler at fridler@rccbi.com. Visit rccbi.com.



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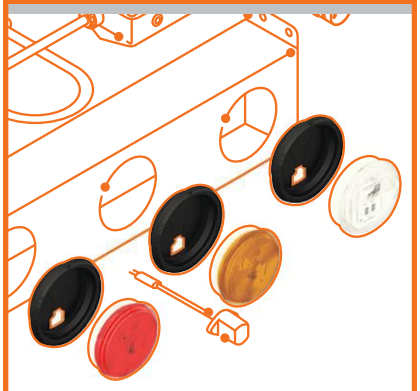

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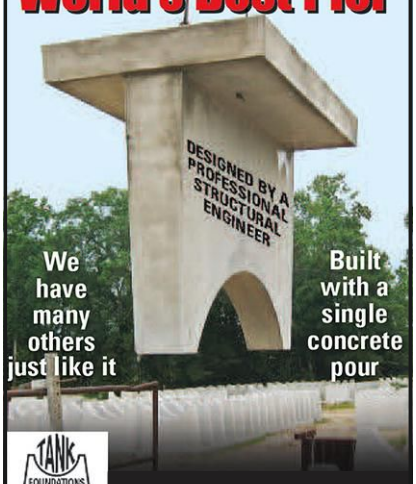

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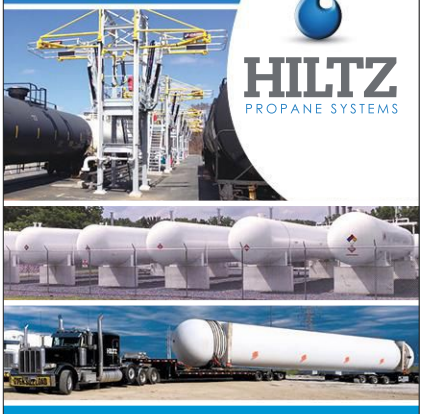
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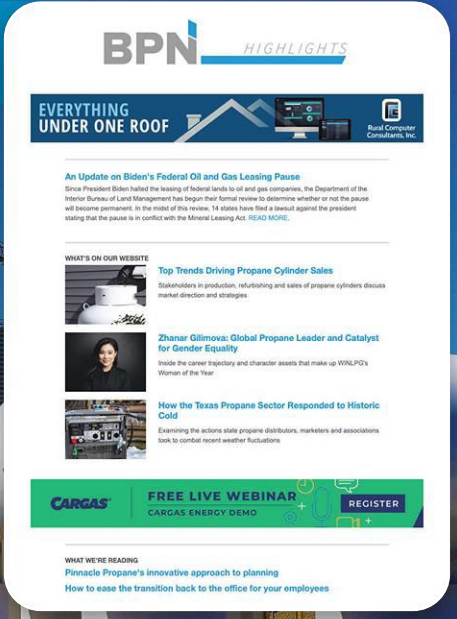

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Stephanie Ulam

Enterprises Office Supervisor, Berkeley Propane Company



Describe your current role at your company. I am the office supervisor of Berkeley Propane Company, so I oversee customer service, sales, dispatching and scheduling. I work closely with the vice president of Berkeley Cooperative Enterprises and the lead delivery service technician to ensure our company runs smoothly.

If you could change something in the industry, what would it be? I would love to see more of the younger generations involved in the industry. The knowledge and wisdom that we get from those that have been in the industry for many years is so valuable; it would be great to share that with the next generations to come.

What are you reading? Currently, I am reading "212 Degree Leadership — The 10 Rules for Highly Effective Leadership" and "212 Degree Service — The 10 Rules for Creating a Service Culture," both written by Mac Anderson.

What advice do you have for someone coming into the industry? Take it all in — and don't let yourself get overwhelmed by the vast amount of information that you will be exposed to. There is so much to learn. After nearly four years in the industry, I am still learning something new every day.

What qualities make a strong leader? A strong leader is one that does not separate themselves from their team. They are willing and able to jump in and fill any role during busy or stressful times, and they celebrate their team's wins. They set a great example by their actions — not just their words — for their team to follow.

> [A strong leader is] willing & able to jump in & fill any role during busy or stressful times, & they celebrate their team's wins.

What's the toughest decision you've made in your current role? The toughest decisions I have made in my current role revolved around how to handle the volatility of the market and the skyrocketing prices of materials. How do we handle this as a company? And how much of the cost increase can we absorb before we begin affecting our customers?

How would you spend an unexpected day off? I would spend an unexpected day off volunteering at my local animal shelter.

What's something that not a lot of people know about you? A lot of people might not know how passionate I am about animal welfare, since I work in a completely different industry. I have fostered over 60 animals through my local animal shelter, and I often share stories of my experiences fostering animals and volunteering at the shelter with my coworkers.

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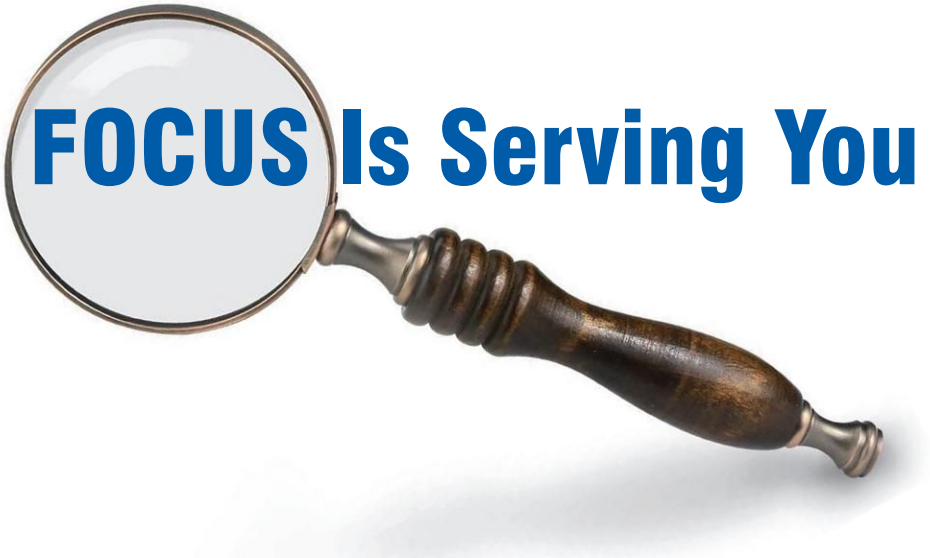

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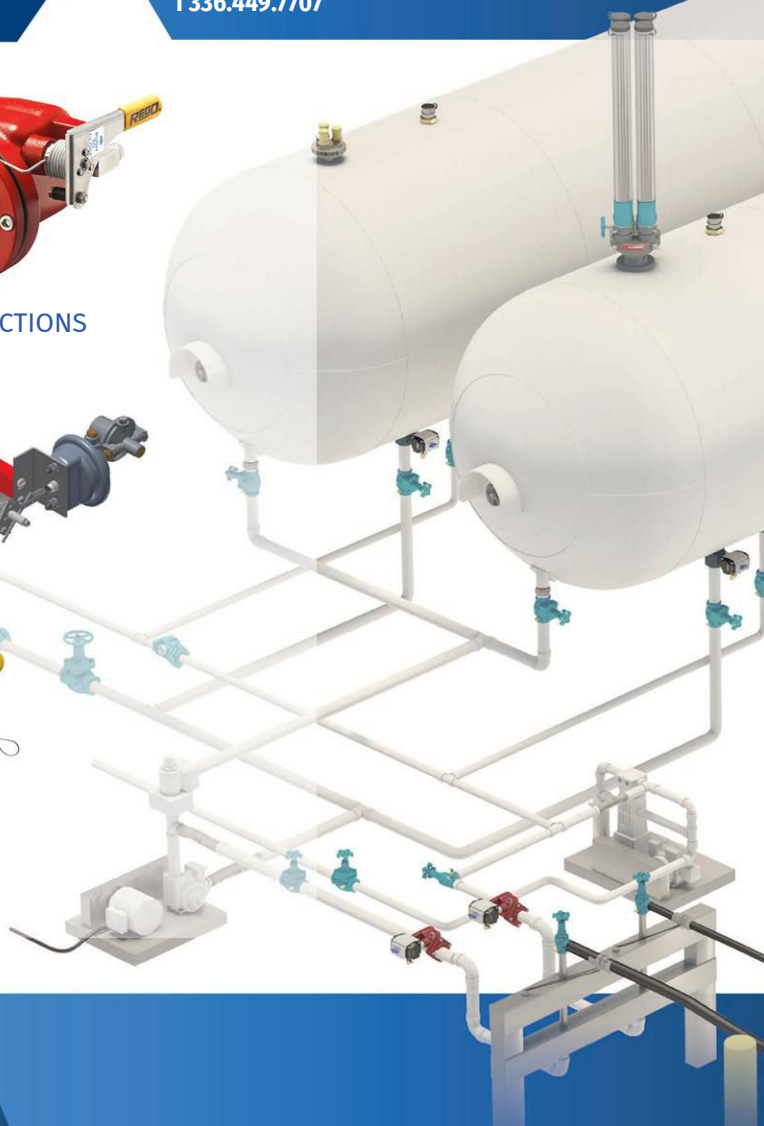

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