



DegreeDays

News from the Virginia Propane Gas Association

Sand, Sun, and Lots of Fun at the Summer Meeting!



VAPGA members, their families, and guests came together July 16-18 at the Marriott VA Beach Oceanfront in Virginia Beach, VA for the 2023 Summer Meeting! This year's meeting had over 85 Marketer and Supplier attendees from 55 different organizations. There were also 14 first-time attendees at the event, and we hope to see many of them again at future meetings! Additionally, we had several spouses and guests attend this year, contributing to the festive and fun atmosphere of our annual summer meeting.

The event kicked off on Sunday with a Captain's Choice golf tournament at Virginia Beach National Golf Club. Despite some morning showers and ominous looking clouds, the field of 40 golfers took to the course for some friendly competition. There were a lot of low scores this year, and congratulations to the team of **Mike Williams, Gary Nouse, Mike O'Connor, and Ken Horton** who carded a 15-under to secure first place! Our generous hole sponsors raised \$3,000 for the Young Gassers Scholarship Fund and thanks to the Supplier Committee, who sponsored the beverages and snacks at the course.

On Monday morning we were joined by two special guest speakers. The first was Glenn Davis, the recently appointed Director of the Virginia Department of Energy. Glenn offered some commentary on Virginia's energy plan and Governor Youngkin's priorities, and his thoughts on the future of the Commonwealth's energy mix. In addition to Mr. Davis, we were honored to be joined

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Fall Meeting



October 1–3, 2023

**The Greenbrier Resort
White Sulfer Springs, WV**

**We Are Looking Forward to
Seeing Everyone in Wild and
Wonderful West Virginia!**

VAPGA is headed west! Join us at "America's Resort" on October 1–3, 2023, at The Greenbrier Resort for the Virginia Propane Gas Association's 2023 Fall Meeting. We have a great event planned, including a golf tournament, industry updates, and networking/meal events with clients and colleagues! We are also excited to have our neighbors to the west join us as we have invited the West Virginia Propane Gas Association to attend.

MORE INFO

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President's Message



Hello VAPGA! I wanted to take an opportunity to thank all of the members that "Ayed" me in for President at the Summer Meeting!

I hope that I can live up to expectations and build upon the success of my predecessors in this position.

There is a more in-depth Q&A in this issue of Degree Days, but I'll give you a brief background of my propane history. I started in the propane business in 1999 with Virginia Propane. The company was owned then by Ken Kelloer and his son-in-law, Ronnie Mitchell. Ronnie and I were great friends and roommates in earlier days.

I started as a Salesman at Virginia Propane, but also went to all the VAPGA sponsored CTEP classes I could because I sometimes filled in as a technician. I also acquired my HAZMAT endorsement for my CDL so I could fill in on a bob-tail, which I often did in the winter.

When Virginia propane was sold in 2017, I went to work for Anderson Propane. Mark Anderson and Nicole Sullivan have been very supportive, and I very much enjoy working at the company.

As for my priorities as your association's president, I believe very strongly that we need to continue to get in front of home builders. It is important that we are able to sell them on gas appliances and gas as a backup on new builds. In September, Jamison Walker and I will be attending the 2023 Virginia Builders Summit in Richmond to represent VAPGA at the annual Homebuilders Association of VA event. If you are interested in attending this event or future events like it... please let us know!

Additional market development opportunities include things like the Heat Pump Helper (featured during the 2023 Summer Meeting) which will continue to position propane as a reliable, abundant, and efficient energy source for homeowners.

Beyond just growing gallons, it is also up to us as an association and industry to promote propane and highlight all of the positive aspects of it to our employees, customers, and legislators. Many of the Delegates and Senators in rural areas are quite familiar with propane, while others in the legislature are not. With several important elections coming up in November, we are in a crucial spot as an industry.

Thanks again for your support, and I look forward to a great year for the association.

Tony Hogue, 2023–2024 President

Get to Know Tony!

How did you end up in the propane industry?

I was in the beer business from 1985 to 1999. In 1999 my son was going to begin kindergarten. In the beer business I worked a lot of weekends and nights. I was a single Dad and had sole custody of my son.

Ronnie Mitchell, who owned Richmond Oxygen and 25% of Virginia Propane was and still is a friend of mine, so I went to work with him. This allowed me to work closer to an 8-5 schedule. Virginia Propane sold to Superior Plus on August 1, 2017. I left Superior Plus and began with Anderson Propane on September 1, 2017.

Do you have a mentor? If so, what's a lesson they've taught you that you'd want to pass on to others?

I have a lot of contacts in our industry. Early on I listened and learned from the CTEP program and experienced service techs. Later, I became good friends with Dennis Cruise. He will find answers for you!

If you could give advice to young professionals in the industry, what would it be?

For the young professionals, I'd say paying attention to safety, continuing education to learn and grow, and customer service are all important.

What aspect of volunteering for VAPGA do you find most rewarding?

I like the people the most. It's also beneficial to promote the industry that takes care of us.

What will you focus on during your term as President?

Continue to promote the safety and sales of propane. And to get in front of the public to let them know propane is a great energy source.

What are your favorite activities outside of work?

I am a very dedicated cyclist. In addition to my road bike, I now have a Wahoo smart trainer and the Zwift app so I can ride with people from around the world in my own home! Also, I like to kayak on the James River.

What's on your music playlist?

Train, Cage the Elephant, Bruce Springsteen, The Script, UB 40 and about another hundred or more artists!

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> **Summer Meeting**, continued from page 1



by Jeff Stewart of Blue Star Gas, who is the current NPGA Chair. Jeff spoke on current NPGA initiatives, as well as the important role that state associations continue to play for the industry. In addition to our speakers, Monday was a full slate of committee meetings, with each committee having an opportunity to discuss their work over the previous months and solicit input from committee members and the membership at-large. Thanks to all the committee chairs and committee members for their continued work in serving the activities of the association.

Tuesday began with the Executive Director's Report and as well as a presentation on FMCSA Basic Compliance facilitated by **Kim Claytor** and her team at Nationwide Resting Association, Inc. Up next, **Jamison Walker** of Blossman Gas and **Randy Doyle** of Holtzman Propane demo'd a new product their companies are working to promote along with Rinnai and PERC, the Heat Pump Helper (HPH). The

rest of the day included a presentation and election preview by VAPGA lobbyist **Mike O'Connor**, safety and training update by **Dennis Cruise**, NPGA update by State Director **John Fields**, as well as the VAPGA Annual Membership meeting. The 2023-2024 slate of officers and board members was presented to and approved by the membership. At the culmination of the Annual Membership meeting, President Tony Hogue took to the stage and addressed the association for the first time as President.

Following a break for lunch, the VAPGA and VPREF Board of Directors met for their summer board meetings, capping off a productive two days of association business. Tuesday evening is when the real fun began, starting off with a cocktail reception on the picturesque terrace overlooking the ocean. The Silent Auction closed right before dinner on Tuesday, and we are so thankful to everyone who donated an item as well as those who bid. In total,

continued on page 7 >



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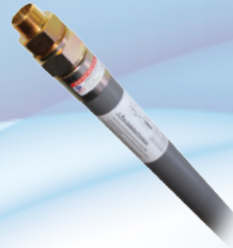


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> Summer Meeting, continued from page 5



we had 16 items that were donated which raised a total of \$3,630 for the Young Gassers scholarship fund!

Then came the Dinner Banquet & Awards Presentation, always a highlight in the summer. Many thanks to everyone who attended, we had over 100 people attend this year's banquet! A full surf and turf buffet made sure no one went hungry this year! During the awards portion of the evening, **Tim Carlson** was honored with the 2023 President's Award and outgoing Safety & Education Committee Chair **Trent Johnson** was awarded the 2023 Safety and Education Award for his many years of service. VAPGA President **Tony Hogue** presented **Meghan Kulinski** with the customary wooden bobtail and thanked her for her service and dedication to the organization. After the food was cleared and the awards wrapped-up, the Shades of Gray band took to the stage for a night of music, drinks, and dancing!

Many thanks to all attendees, volunteers, and hotel staff who made the event a success. I'd also like to recognize the 11 companies who showed their support for VAPGA by contributing to the organization as a 2023 Conference Supporter. Their financial contributions went a long way into helping us make this year's meeting one of the best ever! Those companies are: **Bergquist, Inc.** | **Ditech Testing** | **Gardner Marsh Equipment** | **Kiros Energy** | **Marshall Excelsior** | **Quality Steel Corporation** | **Rural Computer Consultants** | **Rutherford Equipment** | **Tarantin Industries** | **Tiger Fuel** | **Worthington Industries**.

We hope you will join us for our Fall Meeting at The Greenbrier Resort in White Sulphur Spring, West Virginia on October 1-3! See ya then.



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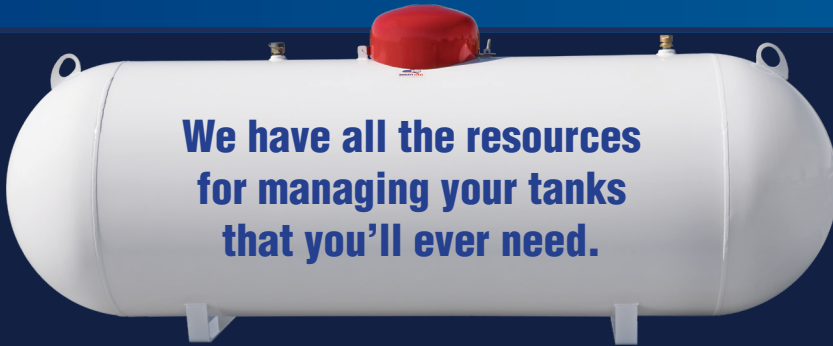
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The mission of VAPGA's PAC is to distribute contributions to candidates for the state legislature who, by their acts, demonstrate support of the propane industry and the private enterprise system. Your donations help VAPGA gain visibility and leverage access to promote our industry. Now more than ever, we need your support to combat the electrification and fuel ban efforts that threaten our industry. Please consider making a donation to the PAC today.

If you'd like to make an investment in the future of Virginia's propane industry, contact [Zach Eisenman](#), Executive Director, or [John Phillips](#), VPAC Committee Chair.

In addition to PAC donations, please let us know if you would be interested in hosting and/or meeting with a legislator this fall.



Last week, VAPGA Representatives **John Phillips, Tony Hogue, Elizabeth McCormick** and VA Petroleum Marketers Convenience Association (VPCMA) President, Mark Anderson, met with Todd Gilbert, Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates to present him with a joint-PAC donation from both associations.

Thank You for Your Generous PAC Donations

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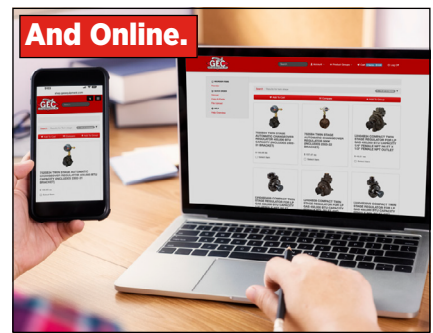
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2023 Young Gassers Scholarship Recipients

Congratulations to our 2023 Young Gassers Scholarship recipients. Our five winners this year demonstrated excellence in the classroom and in their communities, and VAPGA is proud to support their academic endeavors with a \$1,800 scholarship. Thanks to all who donate to support the YG Scholarship Fund throughout the year. Click on the award winner's name to view a short video.



[Tristan Strathy](#)
Gladys, VA
Freshman
Virginia Military Institute



[Sydney Waldrop](#)
Mechanicsville, VA
Sophomore
Randolph-Macon College



[Brooke Worley](#)
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Award Winners



Congrats to **Tim Carlson** for winning the 2023 President's Award!



Congrats to **Trent Johnson** for winning the 2023 Safety & Education Award!

In Memoriam

Emerson "E.B." Bernard Deese, Jr., 88, passed away on Thursday, August 17th, 2023, in Cary, North Carolina, a place he has called home since his graduation from NC State University. Read his obituary [here](#).

Jeffrey "Scott" Turner, 45, of Salisbury passed away peacefully with his family by his side on Monday, July 31, 2023, at TidalHealth Peninsula Regional in Salisbury, Maryland. Read his obituary [here](#).

Recognition

VAPGA member **Lindie Honsberger** was recently featured on an LP Gas Video as a 2023 LP Gas Rising Leader. View the video [here](#).

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Stay in Touch with the Building Trades

Homebuilders, remodelers, renovators and associated building trades continue to be major influencers in developing residential propane load. Add heating and cooling wholesalers, construction equipment rental businesses and appliance retailers to that list of important people with whom propane retailers need to stay in touch.

Staying in touch with builders means becoming their business friends and valued subcontractors on their building projects. Some builders specialize in home renovation and remodeling and should have your attention too.

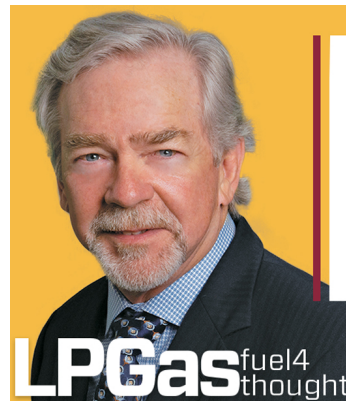
When you provide good service to a builder, they are likely to connect you to their building clients and also recommend you to the other builders in your area. Good service means bringing propane service to their projects when and where they need it.

When you have that type of relationship with builders, they will listen to you about the diverse uses of propane available for the construction process and propane applications to incorporate into their finished projects. You will be the go-to energy provider in your part of propane country.

Propane Applications

Make sure that propane is in the hunt for the five major energy applications in the home.

1. **Space heating:** Be prepared to take your builders and the other building trades to school on the advantages of a high efficiency propane furnace or boiler over an



“We want to keep energy choices for the home eclectic, not all-electric.”

TOM JAENICKE
Warm Thoughts Communications

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electric heat pump for heating the home.

At minimum, talk with your builder about the advantages of propane partnering with the electric heat pump so that the cooling is handled by the electric heat pump and most of the heating is done with propane. Emphasize that propane can be a good partner with heat pumps for year-round comfort, instead of just a backup to the heat pump. You can also retrofit the Heat Pump Helper on existing all-electric heat pumps to gain the many advantages of gas heating (see page 30).

According to the most recent Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS), an average of 42 percent of residential energy consumption is for space heating. Make propane space heating a No. 1 talking point when staying in touch with builders and heating and cooling contractors.

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2. **Water heating:** Typically, the second biggest energy consumer in the home is water heating. Propane has lots of advantages over electric for water heating, but some builders and plumbers may need to be coached to change their electric habits. Show builders, and other contractors involved with water heating choices, the operating cost savings, space savings, increased hot water production and environmental benefits of heating water with storage tank or tankless propane water heaters instead of electric models. If you are staying in touch with builders and plumbing contractors, it should be easy to convince them that propane water heaters are always the best choice.
3. **Cooking:** Gas cooking has gotten some bad press on indoor air quality. Communicate with builders about the real story that all kitchen cooking can be harmful to indoor air quality, no matter what form of energy is used to cook the food. Proper kitchen ventilation, usually required by local building codes, is the simple answer to healthy indoor air quality, whether you are cooking with propane or electricity. Protect energy choice in the kitchen by staying in touch with your builders and plumbing contractors. Tell them cooking with gas is delicious.
4. **Laundry:** In the past, propane dominated the laundry room, with propane clothes dryers and propane water

heaters providing hot water for the washers. Now, too often, you see an all-electric laundry room, and part of the reason is we have not been staying in touch with builders and plumbing contractors about the advantages of drying clothes with propane instead of an all-electric dryer. Faster drying time, fluffier clothes and cost savings are some of the benefits often attributed to propane clothes dryers over electric models.

5. **Hearth:** A propane gas log or fireplace is usually an easy sale over electric versions, but staying in touch with builders about the latest gas fireplace technology is important for maintaining dominance in hearth applications.

We outlined discussion points for the five primary indoor uses of propane, and staying in touch with builders about the many outdoor uses of propane can be just as important. After all, we want to keep energy choices for the home eclectic, not all-electric.

About the Author

Tom Jaenicke is vice president of propane marketing services for Warm Thoughts Communications. He can be reached at tjaenicke@warmthoughts.com or 810-252-7855.

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2023 Rebates



We are still offering \$300 Safe Appliance Rebates for 2023. We recently requested 200 additional safe appliance rebates from PERC, and they will be available soon. See below for program guidelines and a copy of the 2023 application.

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Why Online Reviews Matter

Online reviews help build propane's reputation and can attract new customers to your company.

Online reviews and ratings for businesses have a bigger impact now than any other form of consumer engagement or media, according to Susan Janett, the program director at WarmThoughts Communications.

Before we were so connected by technology, people learned about your propane company from friends or family. Word of mouth was enough to get new customers.

Now, 97 percent of people go to reviews as a first source when making a purchase decision, according to ReviewTrackers.

Where can customers leave online reviews? Google, Facebook and Yelp are common websites to generate reviews from your customers. But don't forget about people sharing their opinions on social media. Social media should be an extension of customer service at your company.

Reviews drive a business's online rating on every major platform. Positive reviews are great – make sure to respond. But negative reviews will drive away customers. According to Janett, it can take 20 years to build a reputation but only one minute to ruin it.

How do reviews impact SEO? Potential customers will read local online reviews of your business before making a purchase decision.

Search engines, like Google, prioritize businesses with higher ratings and help people discover those first. If your propane company doesn't have a lot of reviews or has low ratings, it is less likely to be suggested to online users.

Twenty percent of local search results are influenced by online reviews, according to ReviewTrackers.

Google determines local ranking based on relevance, distance and prominence: "More reviews and positive ratings can improve your business's local ranking," Google states.

Ask your happy customers for reviews. Don't expect happy customers to leave positive reviews without some prompting. Unhappy customers are more likely to share their frustration online.

Not only does your propane company want a positive five-star rating, but it also needs to have context and some information about why your customer is happy.

Encourage customers to add details to an online review by asking some open-ended questions about your company and services provided:

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Would you recommend us to friends and family?

What made you happiest about working with our propane company?

Why did you decide to call our company?

How have we exceeded your expectations?

Were we able to help you in a timely fashion?

Janett says your propane company will need to have 12 good reviews to make up for one bad review.

Ask personally for reviews if you earned it and did a good job for a customer, Janett suggests. Customers can share positive feedback with you in multiple places, but be sure it's documented. Ask in person, by phone, text message, website, email, social media or on invoices.

Bottom line: Everyone looks at online reviews before making a decision. Make sure you know what people are saying about your company.

Social media management tips

It's important to maintain your social media pages on a regular basis. This keeps customers informed and allows you to post updates about your business.

By posting frequently, you can manipulate the social media platform's algorithms. Use more casual and fun posts to catch people's attention. Once they like and engage with your content, the social media platform is more likely to place your content on its feed regularly.

Humanize your team. Share employee photos, community involvement and company events. If you're doing something good, let people know.

Don't let comments go unnoticed. Respond to requests or messages immediately. Be sure to acknowledge all comments and thank anyone who is saying positive things about your company.

Mix up your content. Make it fun and enjoyable to interact with you and your business online. Share photos, videos, promotions and company updates.

Keep it real and relatable. Including a little bit of everything will help people feel connected to your company and team.

Source: Warm Thoughts Communications