

2022 EVENT RECAP

LPGas Growth Summit

Building Propane Partnerships

September 12-14, 2022 • Reunion Resort • Orlando, Florida

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Propane retailers, partners gather

Attendees welcome opportunities to meet in person, learn

BY BRIAN RICHESSON // EDITOR IN CHIEF // brichesson@northcoastmedia.net

About 60 propane retailers and vendor partners gathered for one-on-one meetings as well as education and networking events at the seventh *LP Gas Growth Summit*, held Sept. 12-14 at Reunion Resort, outside Orlando, Florida.

LP Gas launched the annual Growth Summit in 2015 as an avenue for propane retailers to form partnerships that help them expand into both traditional and new markets and increase their operational efficiencies in serving a variety of customers. The Summit was held for the second time since the coronavirus pandemic canceled all events in 2020.

"Getting back to the in-person meetings, the networking, was something that really attracted me to this event," says Steve Farkas of Sharp Energy. "[And] being able to reach out to vendors and have more one-on-one contact – in person, no Zoom, no Teams meetings – and get back to the true value of a networking environment, which this industry does very well."

This year's Growth Summit drew about 20 retail propane companies – representing 15 states – and 14 partners. The agenda on the first day featured boardroom presentations, during which partners introduced themselves and explained their offerings and solutions for



The 2022 *LP Gas Growth Summit* took place Sept. 12-14 outside Orlando, Florida.

the industry, and an evening welcome reception atop Reunion Resort's Grande Tower.

"We were excited to see propane retailers come to the Growth Summit from so many different states," says Brian Kanaba, publisher of *LP Gas*. "They came from coast to coast – from California to Delaware. This really allows for our attendees to learn from their industry peers about what they're experiencing in their own part of the country, in addition to giving our partners a variety of companies to meet."

One-on-one meetings between propane retailers and partners took place during both mornings of the Summit. Retailers visited partner suites at Reunion Resort's Grande Tower for 20-minute meetings in which both sides gained knowledge about the industry.

"What motivated us to attend the *LP Gas Growth Summit* was to learn more about propane," says Ryan Robbins of Button Holdings. "We are newer in the propane industry, and we recognize the tremendous growth opportunity within propane. We want to align ourselves with the best vendors and partners and move forward with what we see as a great

growth industry."

Adds Steve Passio of Button Holdings, "We have a lot of growth at our business. We're building propane rail terminals and growing by way of acquisition. We're going to have tremendous growth in the propane space, so we need to learn the blocking and tackling."

The Rawls Group presented on the topic of employee morale and engagement. Kendall Rawls, the director of development and a second-generation employee, and Dan Iosue, a succession adviser, explained how companies can create a culture of leadership that inspires and motivates employees (see page 32).

LP Gas moderated a propane retailer panel discussion (see pages 30-31) on the final day. Panelists this year were Jason Edwards of Pacific States Petroleum, Ron Snyder of DCC Propane, Cathy Wallace of San Isabel Services Propane and Farkas of Sharp Energy.

During the Growth Summit, attendees also participated in a golf outing at Reunion Resort's Palmer Course and enjoyed a barbecue dinner.

Growth Summit partners this year were ADD Systems, Anova, Blue Cow Software, Cargas, Gray, Gray & Gray, IPS, Legacy Energy Consulting, LP Cylinder Service, Metsa, Otodata, Quality Steel, Rural Computer Consultants, Tiger Payment Solutions and Westmor.

"This is our first year attending," says Kyle Sheehan of Rural Computer Consultants. "It's been a great experience – a lot of one-on-one time, meeting new people and current customers. It's fun going into these individual, one-on-one meetings and figuring out what are people looking for and having those conversations: 'How is your business doing? Where can we help?' Overall, we've had a great experience." **LPG**

JOIN US IN 2023

If you are a propane marketer decision-maker interested in attending the 2023 *LP Gas Growth Summit*, please contact Editor Brian Richesson at brichesson@northcoastmedia.net or 216-706-3748. If you are interested in becoming a Growth Summit partner, please contact Publisher Brian Kanaba at bkanaba@northcoastmedia.net or 216-706-3745.

On the record

Growth Summit attendees offer insights on the event and the propane industry

Propane retailers and vendor partners sat down with LP Gas editors at the 2022 LP Gas Growth Summit for on-camera interviews to discuss their experiences in the propane industry and ways to improve overall propane operations.

RETAILERS

Q: How can businesses raise morale, engage employees and boost productivity?

A: “We’ve noticed that our employees want to be part of something bigger. They don’t want to come to work and just answer a phone or drive a truck. Allowing them the opportunity to provide their ideas, be heard and have a voice in the company has been really important.”

-Lindie Honsberger,
Foster Fuels

A: “I think we need to look at the types of employees we have and the generation gaps. Not all of our employees want the same things and not all of our employees want to be managed in the same way. So we really have to adapt our management styles to each individual employee or team.”

-Donna Howay-Germond, Paraco Gas

Q: How has your company been impacted by labor shortages?

A: “We’ve had three people retire in the last two years. Our industry is more of an aging industry, and the rest of our drivers are getting up there on the spectrum compared to being new.”

-Ryan Aiken, High Grade Gas Service

A: “We have not been affected too bad. As a company, we don’t see a lot of turnover. I think we treat our people very well. The fact that it’s an employee-owned company, everybody’s got a stake in the success of it.”

-Matt Drennen, O.E. Meyer Co.

Q: Could you share how you’ve been impacted by the supply chain issues?

A: “The supply chain has impacted us based on product supply in regard to cylinders. So what we’ve done is we’ve tried to partner with competitors, other vendors, companies

outside of California, to get us the resources necessary in order to continue doing business within the state of California.”

-Jason Edwards, Pacific States Petroleum

Q: Can you tell me about your experiences with propane autogas?

A: “We currently fuel all of our vehicles with propane autogas. It’s a huge cost saver for us. It’s also big testimony to our customers: that we believe in the fuel that we fuel our own vehicles with.”

-Peter Samuelson, Propane Ninja



About 20 retailers attended the LP Gas Growth Summit.

PARTNERS

Q: What have been your overall impressions of this year’s LP Gas Growth Summit?

A: “It’s great to get to move beyond the customer-vendor relationship and really get to know these people, be closer to them and be able to know them better to give them a better service.”

-Daniel Quiroga, Metsa

A: “It’s invaluable for us. The opportunity to talk to 20-plus companies face to face for roughly 15 to 20 minutes. You just can’t get that anywhere else. It’s a very rare opportunity for us to learn but also share information [and] provide feedback where and when we can.”

-Todd Grimm, Cargas

A: “To me, it’s so much better than a normal trade event. You get to sit down one on one with the marketer and with the vendor to discuss in much greater detail, [at a] much higher level. Plus, the social aspect of it – where we have dinners together, we have a golf outing, we have a barbecue – all that leads up to a much deeper level of understanding between the marketer and the vendor.”

-David Dodd, Otodata

A: “I love this Summit. I will come for as long as LP Gas will have us. I just love the deliberate one-on-ones. You could have conversations with people, might not turn into anything, but it becomes the seeds for a relationship that can turn into something down the road.”

-Marty Kirshner, Gray, Gray & Gray

LP Gas Growth Summit Timeline

How the event unfolds

Defining the Summit

The **LP Gas Growth Summit**, formed in 2015 as an avenue for propane industry members to build propane partnerships, is a unique networking event for retail propane decision-makers and vendor partners. Retailers and partners network through prescheduled one-on-one meetings and other events over 2.5 days of the Summit. *LP Gas* offers retailers a complimentary participation package that includes two nights of lodging, meals and golf.

Preparations

LP Gas Publisher Brian Kanaba and Editor-in-Chief Brian Richesson accompany events manager **Allison Blong** from North



Coast Media headquarters in Cleveland to Reunion Resort, outside Orlando, Florida. Once on-site, they take inventory of package deliveries and materials and work to finalize partner suite locations in the resort's Grande Tower, where the one-on-one meetings between propane retailers and partners will take place. They also prepare welcome bags, name badges and folders.

DAY 1

Arrivals and registration

Propane retailer attendees and partners, along with the rest of the *LP Gas* staff, arrive from across the U.S. Notably, retailers attending the Summit this year represent 15 states – from California to Delaware. Attendance for this year's Growth Summit totals about 60.



Boardroom presentations

Boardroom presentations during the afternoon mark the first official event of the Summit. In the boardrooms, the spotlight shines on each of this year's 14 partners, who, one by one, present a quick-hitting overview of their offerings and solutions for propane retailers. This is a good time for partner representatives to introduce



themselves to the full group. Two sessions of propane industry trivia present a refresher of timely topics. For example, the industry sold more than 9.44 billion gallons of propane in 2020, the latest year for available data.

Welcome reception

In the evening, attendees enjoy a welcome reception, including dinner and drinks, atop the Grande Tower's Eleven Restaurant. This is a



good chance for everyone to settle in, relax and meet in a comfortable environment.

DAY 2

Guest speakers

Over the years, a variety of guest speakers have kickstarted the full day of the Growth Summit. They've spoken about propane markets



such as autogas and agriculture, gallon-growing strategies and propane supply plans. This year added to that variety. During a hot buffet breakfast, Kendall Rawls and Dan Iosue of The Rawls Group presented about employee morale and engagement. Rawls, the director of development and a second-generation employee, and

Iosue, a succession adviser, explain how companies can create a culture of leadership that inspires and motivates employees. “People want to be part of something meaningful and feel like they’re making a difference,” Iosue says. See page 32 for more about the presentation.

One-on-one meetings

Soon after the speakers’ presentation, propane retailers and partners begin their one-on-one meetings in partner suites. This year,



attendees have about 20 individual meetings on their schedules, which they receive upon arrival at the Summit. Each meeting lasts 20 minutes as retailers rotate between the partner suites. Partners have the flexibility to conduct meetings however they’d like within their respective suites. That might include demonstrations on computer monitors or simply holding discussions in the comfortable confines of the expansive suite. Breaks in the schedule allow retailers to relax in the *LP Gas* Lounge, where they can mingle with one another while enjoying light refreshments.

Golf outing and barbecue

When the one-on-one meetings conclude for the day, retailers and partners grab a box lunch at the driving range and prepare for a golf outing, held this year on Reunion Resort’s Palmer Course. Following the scramble, attendees enjoy a barbecue dinner with music at the resort’s Seven Eagles pool pavilion. After dinner, it’s common to see attendees engage in friendly cornhole matches.



DAY 3

Panel discussion

LP Gas Editor-in-Chief Brian Richesson moderates a propane retailer panel discussion during breakfast. Panelists this year are,



from left, Cathy Wallace of San Isabel Services Propane, Ron Snyder of DCC Propane, Steve Farkas of Sharp Energy and Jason Edwards of Pacific States Petroleum. The panel addresses a variety of topics, including labor challenges, fuel costs and lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic. See pages 30-31 for more about the panel discussion.

One-on-one meetings

Meetings between retailers and partners conclude on the final day of the Summit. The meetings are designed as a way for retailers and partners to learn about each other and ask key questions. Partners



can inquire about the issues and challenges of retail propane operations. Retailers can inquire about how partners can help address a need – whether retailers are looking to diversify their offerings, improve efficiencies and/or grow gallons year-round. Retailers and partners often are meeting for the first time, but the Summit also gives retailers and partners who are already doing business a chance to strengthen relationships and address pressing issues. By the end of the event, retailers will have met with every partner.

Departures

Following the final meeting slot, attendees prepare to return home, having made new propane partnerships while strengthening others. It’s not uncommon for *LP Gas* staff to hear success stories about how retailers and partners who are now working together first met at the Growth Summit. The Summit is where they built that propane partnership. **LPG**



Remaining resilient

Growth Summit panelists discuss 2022, ongoing labor shortages and high fuel prices

BY CARLY BEMER // MANAGING EDITOR // cbemer@northcoastmedia.net

On the final day of the 2022 *LP Gas* Growth Summit in Orlando, Florida, four decision-makers at retail propane operations reflected on workforce development efforts, operating in a post-pandemic environment and more during a panel discussion.

LP Gas Editor-in-Chief Brian Richesson moderated the panel, which consisted of Cathy Wallace, general manager and owner of San Isabel Services Propane; Ron Snyder, COO of DCC Propane; Steve Farkas, director at Sharp Energy; and Jason Edwards, general manager of propane operations at Pacific States Petroleum.

Here we present insights from the panelists, edited for brevity and clarity.

► WHERE OPERATIONS STAND TODAY

LP Gas: What has your business experienced thus far in 2022? What issues have you been watching?

Snyder (DCC Propane): It comes down to staffing, being able to attract and retain employees needed to operate our businesses. In addition to that, it's trying to manage our way through the inflationary costs that are impacting our business. We all start each year with a budget that we try to manage to, but due to increased wage and fuel cost, this year brings some unique challenges.



Snyder

Wallace (San Isabel Services Propane): People issues are the biggest things that we're dealing with. We've got a lot of turnover in our driver ranks. That's very concerning. We're trying to work with our partners here in the industry to really figure out a way that we can retain drivers and not have them say: "Hey, I'm going to go to Lowe's because they're going to pay me another \$6 an hour, and I don't have

to drive a hazmat truck, and I don't have to go up the hill in the wintertime."

Farkas (Sharp Energy): One area of focus is governmental affairs. We have a very active regulatory environment in many of the states we operate in, whether it's electrification or government agencies wanting to cover more territory and expand their reach into our industry and businesses. As we come into fall 2022 and beyond and [look at] the regulatory environment, it's critical we all remain engaged with the federal, state and local regulatory issues that impact our industry. An effective way to remain engaged is to work with our national/state gas associations. I recommend we all stay on top of the issues and work to maintain a strong voice when addressing issues that impact our industry.



Farkas

Edwards (Pacific States Petroleum): For California, being that it's a very diverse environment and state, we go through a lot of the air quality issues with CARB (California Air Resources Board), also trying to reduce the carbon footprint and provide affordable products for our customers.

► OPERATING IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

LP Gas: What have you learned about your business based on the challenges the pandemic presented, and how are you operating differently because of that?

Wallace: We continued to offer our people incentives to continue to drive. We have a four-day workweek. We pay overtime when the routes are tight in the wintertime. We're just trying to make sure that we maintain the integrity of the business and make sure people are happy.

Snyder: One thing we discovered is our company and industry is very resilient. The people in our industry have a lot of drive and are very dedicated and are willing to do whatever it takes to take care of the customers and meet their needs.

COVID taught us that we need to have backup plans for staffing and interfacing with the customers. COVID brought several challenges, but our industry was extremely fortunate to be less impacted than some other industries.

Farkas: The pandemic was a chance for us to evaluate our business and look at many things that we've done for years. We started to look at every thing we do and how we did it. We asked questions in order to better understand our operations: Why are we doing this? How much time does that take? Is there a better way? Are there technology solutions that could be put in place to address the challenge?

The pandemic did highlight the resiliency of our company and our suppliers. Internally, we were blessed with a staff of very dedicated professionals. We came through the pandemic operating environment well considering it was a situation that we were somewhat unprepared for. At the end of the day, communication was key to success. One area of focus moving forward is evaluating our deployed technology. Technology will be embraced at levels not seen in the past.

Edwards: In our business, it was unique in the aspect that we're a petroleum fuel company. So we were able to diversify our products and provide more than just propane to our customers. We try to provide them with a total solution, providing every single product that we can possibly find for them to streamline their business to make it even more efficient and effective for them.



Edwards

We also really emphasized with our people that it's all about taking customer service to the next level. We tried to get into the mindset of: What we're doing yesterday is just not good enough for us today.

► FUEL PRICES

LP Gas: How have you adapted to high fuel prices?

Snyder: We are focused on driving improved productivity through routing efficiencies. Throughout my 38 years in the industry, there has always been a focus on delivering improved productivity, but given the current inflationary factors it's added a level of urgency.

Farkas: It's an enterprise-wide issue for us. Increased fuel cost is a conversation with every employee that we have so that they all understand the situation we're facing and how it interacts with our operating budget. Our solution is a team effort, making sure that everyone understands what their piece of the puzzle is. Drivers need to understand the impact

of engine idle time. With understanding, idle time becomes something drivers now think about. A focus on miles driven, effective dispatching and routing, is another piece of a puzzle. What we've found is, in most cases, the drivers appreciate the information and involvement. They're a critical part of the business. They've taken ownership of the things they can control, and we're seeing some really positive results.

► WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

LP Gas: Please share one solution that can address the lack of employees or the employee shortage that we're all facing.

Wallace: What we're doing is looking at our operations top down, bottom up. That's all about the people. We have done some increases to wage. Right now, we're looking at some new medical insurance options. You can't just throw somebody another five dollars. It has to be meaningful to the whole company. We're working on how to further advance their loyalty to our business. [It's] not necessarily always financial, but what can we offer them to make them want to stay? A lot of times, it is another dollar, but we have an environment that's very self-sustained. Everybody works together, and that's key for us.



Wallace

Snyder: One program we implemented was an employee referral program to encourage individuals to help recruit new employees to join our team. Our local team members know most of the people in the communities they live and serve, making them a great resource to assist with our recruiting efforts. This program has been well received by our teams and has proven to be an effective approach.

Farkas: As far as finding new drivers, we're looking at the driver training schools and tech schools. We have a number of organizations we interact with. One organization up in the mid-Atlantic is Vets2Techs, where you're taking military people that are transitioning from the military to the private sector. These are well-trained people looking for private sector jobs. Vets2Techs is a good avenue for the propane industry to find employees.

Edwards: Our company changed to becoming an ESOP company, so every employee became a 100 percent owner of the company. They're giving back even more than they normally would have because now they're part of the solution.

We've hired an internal recruiter who works for our company. We can put [potential] employees with someone who has actually been in our company, has gone through the steps of being a driver, a dispatcher and now a recruiter. [It] has been beneficial to us because we've been able to not only retain our existing drivers but also gain new drivers who had no idea of what a driving position looked like. **LPG**

Reimagining culture

Growth Summit presenters touch on the ties between workforce development and a company's purpose

BY CARLY BEMER // MANAGING EDITOR // cbemer@northcoastmedia.net

Company culture matters. That was the message 2022 LP Gas Growth Summit attendees heard during the first morning of the event as two members of business strategy firm The Rawls Group – Kendall Rawls, director of development, and Dan Iosue, succession planner – discussed ways to improve employee recruitment and retention at propane companies.

► WHY DEFINE A CULTURE?

Company culture is the sum of the shared goals, vision, values, practices and attitudes in a workplace.

According to Rawls, culture is either implied or expressed. An expressed culture is intentionally defined for employees. Conversations take place about how team members should treat one another, customers and partners. Companies should pursue an expressed culture for a number of reasons.

First, without an expressed culture, Rawls says, employees “figure it out or create it right on their own,” generally choosing what is in their best interest. The issue with that, she explains, is that there are multiple definitions of culture throughout an office, often leading to conflict and confusion.

In addition, a defined culture becomes



Dan Iosue touches on employee morale.

a recruiting tool in and of itself. It leads to happier employees who are eager to promote the company to their friends, neighbors and family who may be interested in joining the team.

“If you have a strong team in your organization and [outside] people are looking for work, [current employees] are going to say: ‘Hey, I work at a really great place. Why don’t you come work with us?’” Rawls says. “That’s a really great recruiting strategy because now you have someone who you trust that is bringing on someone that trusts you.”

► A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP

A positive company culture benefits both the employees and company.

When companies are searching for potential new hires, they have several traits in mind.

“We want people at our workplace to engage,” Iosue says. “We want them to be resilient and show some grit and be flexible. We want them to be accountable, to have independence and autonomy to make the decisions that we want them to make when we’re not around. So we have some leadership leverage. We want them to work fast; we want them to be empowered. We basically want them to be superstars.”

Meanwhile, employees look for four things from employers: purpose, education, autonomy and feedback. These, in turn, give back to the company by creating motivated, engaged employees, Rawls and Iosue explain.

Purpose. When a company’s mission is clear, employees have a defined sense of purpose. That provides meaning to employees’ day-to-day roles and inspires them to work toward a common goal.

Education. Providing educational and



Kendall Rawls addresses attendees.

developmental opportunities increases employee engagement. A company leader should understand who is on their team, where they are from a skills perspective and how to create education and development programs to bring them up.

Autonomy. Autonomy boosts morale and gives employees a sense of ownership in their work. According to Rawls, that ultimately leads back to the idea of purpose.

“Without great people and people who are engaged and inspired, whatever your vision is and goals are, [they] can’t be carried out.”

KENDALL RAWLS, *The Rawls Group*

“If they understand their purpose, they understand how they impact [people],” she says. “They understand what their clear roles and responsibilities are.”

Feedback. Frequent feedback for employees creates a more open dialogue.

“What we’re finding is that more frequent developmental conversations with people goes a long way as far as how they feel they’re viewed in the organization,” Iosue says.

Ultimately, to retain employees and achieve business objectives, employers should evaluate if their workplace culture is supported by employees. Employees who stand behind a company’s culture are more motivated to excel and give back.

“Fundamentally, without great people and people who are engaged and inspired, whatever your vision is and goals are, [they] can’t be carried out,” Rawls says. **LPG**