

2024 EVENT RECAP

LPGas Growth Summit

Building Propane Partnerships

September 17-19, 2024 • Reunion Resort • Orlando, Florida

OUR PARTNERS



Rural Computer
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LP Gas Growth Summit draws about 80 to Orlando

Propane retailers, partners meet in 'quiet, more intimate environment'

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

The ninth annual *LP Gas* Growth Summit was held Sept. 17-19 at Reunion Resort in the Orlando, Florida, area with about 80 members of the propane industry participating in a variety of networking events.

The Growth Summit, which launched in 2015, brings retail propane company decision-makers together with industry partners to discuss growth opportunities and ways for retailers to improve their operations. The event's tagline is "building propane partnerships."

This year's Summit drew 20 retail propane companies, with attendees arriving from 18 states, while a record number of partner companies (20), representing a variety of equipment and services categories, attended one of the industry's final events of the calendar year.

"We're excited to have so many retailers and partners join us this year," says *LP Gas* Publisher Brian Kanaba. "We know the retailers are ready to learn about growth opportunities for their businesses, and the partners are ready to showcase offerings to help the retailers meet their goals. Without a doubt, this is a special year for the Summit."

The event features one-on-one meet-



The *LP Gas* Growth Summit features one-on-one meetings between propane retailers and partners. The intimate meetings give attendees the chance to make strong connections.

ings between retailers and partners, educational opportunities and other networking functions.

The one-on-one meetings serve as the foundation of the Growth Summit, as retailers and partners follow their respective meeting schedules prepared by *LP Gas*. Retailers rotate among the resort's Grande Tower suites to visit with each of the partners. Each meeting lasts 20 minutes.

"This is our fifth go-around at the *LP Gas* Growth Summit," says Marty Kirshner, partner at Gray, Gray & Gray. "It's the best opportunity to have one-on-one conversations with retailers and marketers in a quiet and more intimate environment. We're always looking to make new relationships."

Pat Hyland, who retired in September after 27 years in the propane industry, the last 12 with the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), addressed the group and shared his perspectives as a leader with PERC and previously as the editor of *LP Gas* magazine (see page 38). Similarly, several propane retailers lent their insights about the propane industry during a panel discussion (see page 39).

The Growth Summit also presents other networking opportunities for retailers and partners, including a welcome reception, golf outing, a luncheon for non-golfers and a barbecue.

"We have not been here in several years as a company," says Jennifer Jackson, director of territory operations for AmeriGas. "Knowing there was new vendor partnerships to be had, new technology to be looking at and the fact that we hadn't participated in a while all came together of wanting to be present and wanting to be involved. I was very privileged to get to be invited."

Growth Summit partners participating this year were ADD Systems; Anova; Cargas; Gray, Gray & Gray; IPS; Legacy Energy Consulting; LP Cylinder Service; Metsa; Mopeka; Nexio; One-Tank; Otodata; P3 Propane Safety; PDI Technologies; Precise Alternative Fleet Solutions; Quality Steel; Rural Computer Consultants; Tiger Payment Solutions; Warm Thoughts Communications; and Westmor.

The Growth Summit will celebrate its 10th event in 2025. It wasn't held in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **LPG**

JOIN US IN 2025

If you are a propane retailer decision-maker interested in attending the 2025 *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.

What attendees are saying

First-timers and event veterans share their views on the Growth Summit

► RETAILERS

"I've only been in the industry for about six years, so it's a great learning opportunity. So far, I've enjoyed it. It is like drinking from a fire hydrant all at one time, but [I am] definitely learning things that I didn't expect to learn. I've been to a few of the larger conferences where you have 30 people that you all speak to at the same time, so the more intimate setting is really great."

– **Stephanie Ulam**, Berkeley Propane

"It's a fantastic opportunity, and I would certainly, in talking to other people who've never experienced it, encourage them to take advantage of it if invited, because it's been a terrific experience. I have lots of information that I can now take back and share."

– **Katherine Dixon**, Cumberland Gas

"I thought it was a really good opportunity as a younger guy in the industry to be able to meet with partners that we already work with and to develop new relationships with potential future partners. I learned a lot. It's nice putting a name with the face of people who we deal with quite a bit already, and it's obviously nice to make new friendships and relationships with potential future business partners."

– **Neal Gray**, Johnson Oil

"I've heard really good things about the Growth Summit from other people who attended in the past. Really wanted to come down and check it out and meet with vendors and other people in the industry and gain some knowledge. It's been great."

– **Ryan Vance**, Stuck Enterprises

"I was excited to get an invite to the Growth Summit, being newer in the propane industry, having an opportunity to meet some of the industry leaders, so I didn't want to miss out on this opportunity."

– **Jesse Rack**, Rack Energy

► PARTNERS

"This year is better than last year, which was better than the year before. It just continues to get better. All I can ask is that you guys don't stop doing this."

– **Nick Virchow**, Anova



Ulam



Dixon



Gray



Vance



Rack



Virchow

"It's a laid-back environment. Brian and Brian and the rest of the *LP Gas* team do a great job bringing down the right mix of folks, and I always have a positive impression, and I'll continue to come until I don't."

– **Marty Kirshner**, Gray, Gray & Gray

"We've been here since it started. We learn as much from our customers and retailers as they learn about all the different vendors that are here. You always leave with extra contacts, and it's just been very beneficial for all, and I'm really proud to be a part of it."

– **Jeff Vandemark**, IPS Equipment

"I've grown to expect a level of excellence from the Summit that has fulfilled expectations, as usual. I think the group that came to this Summit is very much in our wheelhouse, and the best part is that I didn't know many of the people here, which I equate to opportunity, and that got me really excited. The model works. I praise the Summit to everyone who listens, sometimes obnoxiously, and I'm very proud to be a part of it and want to continue for many years."

– **Robert Kenney**, Metsa

"Everybody we have spoken to sitting here is here for a reason. They have a problem; they need solutions. This is not a simple investment, like going to a convention where I pay for my badge and I can walk around. When you're here, you're here because you have a reason and a purpose."

– **Kevin Jaffe**, Mopeka

"I feel like every year I pull something out of the Summit. For me, it's not just a sales tool that we have out there. To me, it's an opportunity to ask the marketers, 'What are your pain points right now? How can we improve or make a new product offering that would make your life easier?'"

– **Kyle Sheehan**, Rural Computer Consultants



Kirshner



Vandemark



Kenney



Jaffe



Sheehan

HOW THE *LP GAS* GROWTH SUMMIT UNFOLDS

The *LP Gas* Growth Summit is a 2.5-day event that gathers retail propane company decision-makers and industry partners for one-on-one meetings, educational opportunities and other networking functions – all with the goal of building propane partnerships. Here's a look at how the Growth Summit unfolds at Reunion Resort, outside Orlando, Florida.

► DAY 1

REGISTRATION 1

Propane retailers and partners travel to Orlando. This year, decision-makers from 20 retail propane companies arrive from 18 states. A record number of partner companies (20), representing a variety of equipment and services categories, also attend. Attendees check in at Reunion Resort and at the *LP Gas* Growth Summit registration table. This year, attendees receive welcome boxes, which feature an *LP Gas*-branded Bluetooth speaker, luggage tag and notebook. They also receive welcome folders that include their schedules for the next two days. An added bonus for propane retailers: *LP Gas* magazine covers their lodging, meals and golf.



MEET THE PARTNERS 2 3 4 5 6 7

The first official event on the Growth Summit agenda takes place at 3 p.m. in a Reunion Resort ballroom. *LP Gas* Publisher Brian Kanaba shares a video about the Growth Summit to give attendees an idea of what to expect over the next couple of days. In this session, partners enter the ballroom – one company at a time – and introduce themselves to propane retailers. Partners take a few minutes to share details about their company and the role it plays in the propane industry. These introductions also give retailers a better understanding of the companies they'll meet with over the next two days. Editor-in-Chief Brian Richesson shares propane industry trivia.



WELCOME RECEPTION 8

As the Growth Summit gets underway, attendees settle in and now can unwind after traveling to Orlando. Retailers and partners gather at Eleven Restaurant, high atop the Grande Tower, for drinks and dinner. The reception is the first chance for retailers and partners to meet one another in a relaxed setting, which features a balcony by the pool and a picturesque view of the Orlando area.



► DAY 2

BREAKFAST AND SPEAKER 9

The Growth Summit begins early with a hot breakfast and featured speaker. This year, Pat Hyland, who retired in September after 27 years in the propane industry, the last 12 with the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), addresses the group and shares his perspectives as a leader with PERC and previously as the editor of *LP Gas* magazine (see page 38).



INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS 10 11

The one-on-one meetings between propane retailers and industry partners are the foundation of the *LP Gas* Growth Summit. Retailers and partners follow their respective meeting schedules, with retailers rotating among the Grande Tower suites to visit with partners. Each meeting lasts 20 minutes before retailers are asked to move on to their next meeting. *LP Gas* conducts video interviews with retailers and partners, and an *LP Gas* Lounge provides a place for attendees to relax and grab a snack between meetings. The lounge is also a great place for retailers to visit with one another.



GOLF OUTING AND LUNCHEON FOR NON-GOLFERS 12

When the first round of meetings end, retailers and partners carry their conversations to the golf course. After taking a group photo and grabbing a boxed lunch, the golfers participate in a scramble on Reunion Resort's Palmer Course. Non-golfers enjoy conversations during lunch at the clubhouse.



BARBECUE 13

More great networking opportunities continue in the evening during a popular barbecue dinner next to the Seven Eagles Pool. Golfers review final team scores and rehash their time on the course. *LP Gas* recognizes team and contest hole winners. After dinner, attendees enjoy a friendly game of cornhole and the camaraderie they've built to this point.



► DAY 3

BREAKFAST AND PANEL DISCUSSION

The final day of the Growth Summit begins again with a hot breakfast and more education. This year's panel features propane marketers Brian Green of Green's Blue Flame Gas in Houston, Jennifer Jackson of national retailer AmeriGas and Bruce Spiridonoff of Tevis Energy in Westminster, Maryland. Topics include market segments ripe for growth, technology, and opportunities and threats to the industry (see page 39).

INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS 14 15

After breakfast, retailers and partners begin the second round of one-on-one meetings in the Grande Tower suites. By the time the Growth Summit ends around mid-day, attendees will have had 20 individual meetings, forming the building blocks for propane industry partnerships.

► 2025

It's not too early to reserve your place at the 2025 *LP Gas* Growth Summit. Propane retailer decision-makers can apply now. See page 40 for more information.

Finding his place

Longtime editor, former PERC leader helped propane marketers 'clear hurdles'

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

Pat Hyland still remembers clearly his first trade show experience in the propane industry.

The former newspaper reporter had stepped down as the editor of a Catholic newspaper in the Diocese of Cleveland to become the editor of *LP Gas* magazine in 1997. He soon found himself at the Southeastern Convention in Atlanta, where he never felt so alone.

After a couple of hours on the show floor, Hyland thought to himself: "You are in the wrong place. You do not belong here."

► HOW THINGS CHANGE

Hyland settled into his new role and spent the next 15 years leading the editorial side of *LP Gas*. He spent 12 more years in communications roles with the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC). Not only did Hyland learn that he belonged in the propane industry, but he also began to thrive and lead.

"I eventually realized that I enjoyed helping propane marketers clear their individual hurdles and leverage emerging opportunities to help them grow their businesses, and that's where I found my place in the industry," he says.

Hyland, who retired in September, retraced his 27 years in propane, shared some of his observations from his time with *LP Gas* and PERC, and emphasized helpful points for propane marketers as the featured speaker at the *LP Gas* Growth Summit.

In his years as editor of *LP Gas*, Hyland recognized how the propane industry epitomizes the American dream.

"It's thousands of small, dedicated business owners who are investing in themselves, in their drive to succeed, [with] family names proudly embossed on a bobtail that's working long hours

to help their hometown community thrive," Hyland says. "For so many, it's a proud legacy carried down from their fathers and grandfathers."

Hyland told the industry's stories to thousands of *LP Gas* readers before his new position with PERC in 2012 allowed him to expand on his role as a communicator.

He was fascinated by PERC's role to serve existing and emerging propane markets, to help nudge the industry along in ways propane marketers lacking adequate resources could ever undertake on their own. He called the staff there "some of the smartest, most talented and hardest-working individuals I've met anywhere."

In his years as editor of *LP Gas*, Hyland recognized how the propane industry epitomizes the American dream.

"The industry entrusts PERC to wisely invest its assessment dollars to help it grow the sale of propane nationwide," Hyland says.

During his time with PERC, Hyland worked closely with the state propane associations – to ensure their members were aware of PERC, understood council programs and the benefits to propane operations, and realized the many resources available to them.

"Whether speaking at state association meetings, writing articles or socializing at industry events, my goal was always to connect those dots," he says.

For propane marketers to grow, Hyland says, they must consider the following points:

- **Learn what doesn't work.** Early in his career, Hyland recalls propane companies stealing customers from



Pat Hyland bids farewell to the propane industry during breakfast at the *LP Gas* Growth Summit.

other companies in "a vicious cycle" that wasn't sustainable.

- **Understand propane is a service industry.** "Where the propane industry has always thrived is in those small communities where we live and operate, and we know those people; we know those customers," he says.

- **Walk the walk; don't just talk the talk.** Hyland says autogas is a good example. "We have for the last 10 years identified autogas as one of the best opportunities to steal gasoline and diesel gallons and pad the propane industry domestically. Worldwide it's happening; we're way behind the curve." More propane marketers should consider adopting autogas in their own fleets, he adds. "There is not a piece of equipment in your fleet right now that cannot run on propane."

- **Be open to the available tools.** "We have a lot of materials to help you and your business do whatever it is you want to do," Hyland says of PERC. "You tell us what you need to succeed." **LPG**

Propane retailer insights

Growth Summit panel discusses emerging markets, tech, labor and more

LP Gas Editor-in-Chief Brian Richesson moderated a panel discussion with three propane retailers during breakfast on the final morning of the Growth Summit. The panel included:

- **Bruce Spiridonoff**, COO, Tevis Energy, Westminster, Maryland
- **Jennifer Jackson**, director of territory operations, AmeriGas, King of Prussia, Pennsylvania
- **Brian Green**, vice president, Green's Blue Flame Gas, Houston

The panelists discussed topics like propane markets, technology, labor, the future of the propane industry and more.

LP Gas: Can you share a little bit about your mindset coming into the summit, as far as what you're focused on this year at your respective companies?

Green: My mindset was, what else can we do that we're not doing to obtain more customers, provide a better service to those customers and then streamline or be better, more efficient in our operations to both make it easier on our team and ourselves, and to be able to provide that level of service to our customers.

Jackson: We go to a lot of these events, the director meetings where you network and talk with vendors, but I've never really had an environment where it was targeted for those partnerships and to really look at what your business needs. And I thought this was exciting, that this is what this is all about, and the only reason that we're here is to do that.

Spiridonoff: I've been doing this for about 30 years, and for the last eight to 10 years, I kind of took a little bit of a break on the propane side of the business and have been focusing on the distillates. So, this is a great opportunity for me to kind of get reconnected with a lot of people and just kind of see the new technologies that are out there.

LP Gas: Are there certain propane markets or areas that you're focusing on as far as growth, and, if so, what steps are you taking?

Green: We're continually trying to grow in all our standard markets – residential, commercial, things like that. We've recently put a lot of effort into working with resellers, and how we go about that, we're kind of taking a different approach. It's some-



Brian Richesson, right, moderates a panel discussion involving, from left, Bruce Spiridonoff, Jennifer Jackson and Brian Green on the final day of the LP Gas Growth Summit.

thing that we didn't have much in the past, and we've kind of focused on that.

Jackson: We're focused on getting back to basics and operating as a business, and what that looks like for our employees, reducing turnover, making sure that we get that tenure back that we've always had and making sure that when we are ready to pursue aggressive growth, that we're able to handle that growth and that it works out well for the customer.

Spiridonoff: For Tevis, we have a very large distillate business servicing about 50,000 customers. So, the propane side of our business is much, much smaller, but we've been focusing for the last six to eight months on our commercial business lines and really trying to kind of cross-sell and market through those chains that we already have – those relationships with those commercial customers. **LP Gas**

TO READ MORE: This discussion has been edited for length and clarity. For the transcript of the full panel discussion, visit lpgasmagazine.com.