



By
NATALIE
PEAL

Our Gift of Giving

When I ventured to Cape Town, South Africa in late October for the 20th World LP-Gas Forum, I did not know exactly what I would experience. I knew I would have the opportunity to meet propane people from around the world, hear updates on the companies and new technologies that affect our industry, as well as taste new foods, travel for the first time in the Southern Hemisphere, see a different culture, and possibly see an animal or two that would not be found on the streets of Los Angeles. What I did not expect was to feel the rekindling of pride in our industry.

The first day of the conference was dedicated to Africa—Lighting the Dark Continent. It certainly was an eye-opener. Many of us have heard the statistics about the poverty on this continent, and have seen the heart-wrenching photos of the children in need. The speakers did not dispel this image.

In many parts of the continent, foraging for wood or other fuel to cook a meal is the primary task each day for women and children. For more than 12 hours a day, this is all they do. In addition, the cooking is done within the home, filling the dwelling with smoke and soot that are damaging the health of the inhabitants.

Can That Be True?

One speaker told attendees that 5000 persons die each day as a result of the poor indoor air quality that they experience constantly. The figure did not seem possible to me, so I questioned an attendee from South Africa for an explanation. He said the figure was correct—not all would be the direct result of the indoor pollution, but it is definitely a contributing factor.

As dismal as this sounded, there was a reason for hope. A program is in the works to combat the pollution caused by the fires. Propane companies in Africa have a founded a pro-gram to replace the wood and/or paraffin fires used for cooking with a two-burner propane stove and a

canister of gas. The benefit of this is twofold. Besides cleaning up the air inside the dwelling, it is no longer necessary to find firewood. Instead, the women will be able to learn a trade or a craft to bring in money to upgrade their standard of living, and the children can attend school to get an education. It is hoped that this will be a means to change the continent's pervasive cycle of poverty.

Several days later, following the New Product Development Session chaired by the Propane Education & Research Council's (PERC) president and CEO, Roy Willis. I witnessed more of the generosity of the propane industry. The hybrid propane/solar power system that had been on display at the World LP-Gas Association's Trade Show, which was held in conjunction with the Forum, was donated to the University of Cape Town (UCT). There it will be used to train engineering students before eventually being put into service at one of South Africa's many rural vil lages that do not have grid connections.

The system was manufactured by Polar Power Inc. (Carson, Calif.). Funding from a PERC grant made it possible for the unit to be sent to South Africa and later offered to UTC. When the grant was approved in July, Willis was given the authorization to give the hybrid unit to a suitable educational facility, health clinic, or community center following the exhibition.

Arthur Sams, president of Polar Power Inc., also agreed to collaborate with UCT professor Phillip Lloyd on curriculum design and the development of site selection criteria. This industry grant goes much further than gift of knowledge that will provide unimaginable benefits.

Closer to Home

The generous spirit of propane people really goes much further and is often times overlooked. One example is the National Propane Gas Foundation (NPGF) scholarship fund, created in 1994, which was the brainchild of Gail Therrell, the late wife of Milford Therrell (Squibb Taylor; Dallas). She also served as NPGF's founding chair. Since 1996, daughters and sons of individuals employed by propane companies have been awarded more than \$607,000 in scholarships. Four hundred-eighteen scholarships have been given thanks to the hard work and charity of the propane industry. This year alone, 56 scholarships totaling \$82,500 were awarded.

Much of the funding for the scholarships comes from, among others, the Young Gasser's annual golf tournament in Atlanta, as well as raffles held by Trinity (Dallas) and Fisher Controls (McKinney, Texas) during the Southeastern Convention. Trinity has raffled Harley Davidson motorcycles to benefit the scholarship fund, while Fisher sponsors a raffle for a number of items that benefits the fund,

and the company then matches the proceeds from the raffle. These are in addition to individual and company donations. This is a year-round effort that enables many young people to pursue a dream that might have been outside their reach.

State associations have also played a major role in contributions in recent years. The Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, and North Carolina associations have now been designated Platinum Donors (\$50,000). Topping this list is the Missouri Association. With its \$225,000 in donations, it is able to award eight \$2000 scholarships annually.

Other state associations handle their own fundraising and scholarship programs. Among them is the Western Propane Gas Association (WPGA), which holds a golf tournament and silent auction in conjunction with its annual convention and trade show in May. WPGA provides funding to scholars in the amounts of \$500 to \$3000. This past year, it honored eight recipients with scholarships totaling \$12,000.

One of the other endeavors is Breast Cancer Awareness. Pink trucks have popped up across the nation to support this cause. Manufacturers have donated an equivalent to the cost of their equipment for these vehicles, and pennies per-gallon-sold on these trucks are being given by dealers to their favorite breast cancer or similar charity. One company's desire to "give back" or to honor a loved one has grown into a countrywide campaign. (Read more about this campaign on p. 30, "Why Pink?")

Another project in the works is one dedicated to Prostate Cancer Awareness, which seems most fitting for this male-dominated industry. According to Ed Varney of Fisher Controls, who is one of the key players pushing this program forward, this group hopes to increase awareness of prostate cancer as well as raising funds for the Prostate Cancer Foundation. They expect to kick off the program in early 2008. One event they hope to have on the agenda during the Southeastern Convention in Atlanta is prostate screening. Light blue trucks, similar to those being utilized by the Breast Cancer Awareness program, may be driving across the nation in the near future. With the determination of propane industry personnel, this is bound to be another successful project.

Year-round, there is a special gift of giving provided by those involved in this business. Ever since I can remember, my mom and dad told me that this is a unique industry and that propane people are special people indeed. And I must agree.

As 2007 comes to a close, it is a great time for reflection and to also look to the future. How can you make 2008 a little brighter for someone else?

Happy holidays and best wishes for 2008.