

Propane supplier sees cars fueling sales and savings

By Dana Olsen
Staff Writer

When Harry Platz started a propane distribution company in 1936, many of his clients in northern San Luis Obispo County had never heard of the alternative fuel source.

Nearly 80 years later, Harry's grandson Bill Platz is at the helm of what's now known as Delta Liquid Energy, the 25th largest propane company in the country. Harry developed the company as a dealership — he made a deal with a propane distributor in Cayucos and brought portable bottles of the fuel to residences and businesses in Atascadero, Bill Platz told the Business Times. When Harry passed away in the 1940s, his wife Iva took over the business.

The next decade, Bill's father and uncle bought the business from their mother and expanded it throughout the state, and Bill bought out his uncle in the late '80s. Today, Paso Robles-based Delta Liquid Energy has nine outposts in California and brings in about \$45 million in revenue per year. The company employs 55 people in the San Luis Obispo County region and another 46 throughout the state.

"In the 1930s, propane was just starting out. It was a cutting-edge business at the time. People were still using kerosene and oil, and electricity was just coming into use," Bill said. "And now, we're celebrating our 100th anniversary as an industry."

While his grandfather was mainly in the

Delta Liquid Energy

Type: Private

Location: Paso Robles

Industry: Propane

2011 revenue: \$44.7 million

2012 rank: 17

business of installing propane tanks to heat stoves and water heaters, Bill and his sister, Cindy Platz-Belmont — who's in charge of the financial end of the company — are concentrating on promoting propane as transportation fuel.

"We're strong proponents of using propane in cars because it's a natural, domestic fuel. The U.S. exports propane, so why not use it?" Bill said. "Our company is one of the premiere promoters and marketers of propane as a transportation fuel in California."

SAVINGS AT THE PUMP

Filling up a car's tank with propane, the third most widely used transportation fuel in the country, costs half as much as using gasoline or diesel. The problem in California is that the state's Air Resource Board has put up significant hurdles to allowing vehicles to operate on propane. Only Ford and General Motors make cars that are ap-

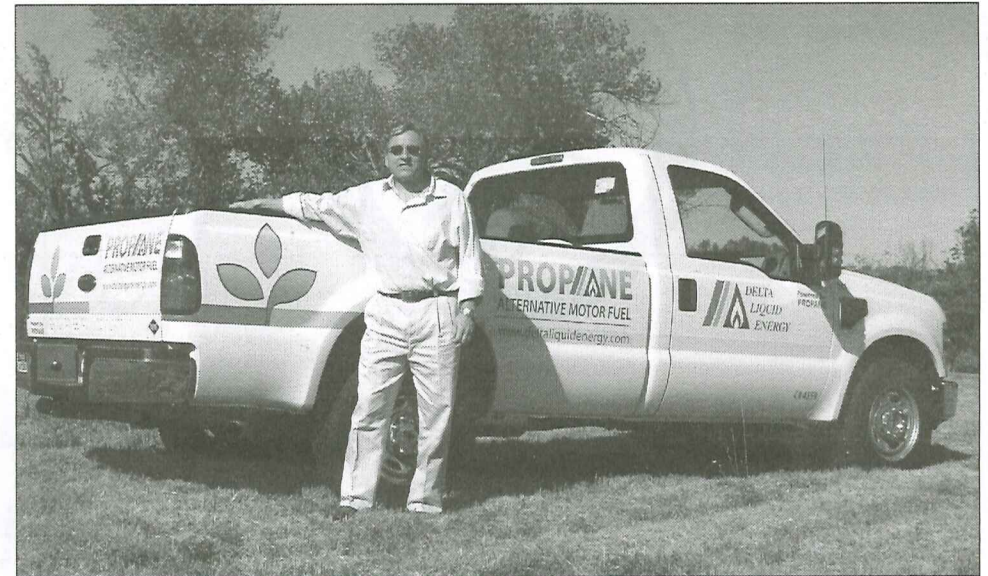


PHOTO COURTESY DELTA LIQUID ENERGY

Bill Platz, president of Delta Liquid Energy, says the company will push for more types of vehicles to be fueled by propane, which costs half as much as using gasoline or diesel.

proved for propane use in California.

The alternative fuel is widely used in fleets. Delta Liquid Energy has many customers, such as plumbers and school bus companies, that use propane in their line of work. One big customer is Road Runner Transportation, a shuttle company that brings airplane passengers to and from Los Angeles International Airport.

Delta Liquid Energy's next big project, Bill said, is to try to make propane available for more types of vehicles and reach more customers in the state.

Although the company is making a push in the transportation realm, propane

has many other uses, Bill said. The company's big business is piping propane into houses and other buildings that don't have natural gas lines. The company also provides propane to agricultural businesses that use it for water pumping and harvest processing.

The family-owned company has come a long way since it was born in the heart of the Great Depression.

"I credit the success to hard work. We're out there every single day talking to customers," Bill said. "We've done a lot to promote propane. We're trying to promote it wherever it can possibly be a useful fuel."