

December 2008

The Hartselle

Connection

Serving Hartselle's People, Building for Hartselle's Future

Winter Electric and Natural Gas Rates Drop 6%

Hartselle Utilities customers will pay about six percent less for natural gas this winter over last winter, says Accounting and Finance Manager Bob Sittason.

Normally, Hartselle Utilities tries to lock in natural gas prices several months in advance of cold weather, with the goal of having guaranteed prices on approximately 80 percent of the natural gas the utility expects to purchase based on weather forecasts. However, this summer, Sittason says, the price for natural gas was selling at \$14 per decatherm, which is almost double the amount the utility paid last year. Instead of locking in prices at that amount, Sittason chose to wait out the market. When they did lock in prices during November, the cost had dropped to \$6.68 per decatherm, the lowest price so far this year, he says.

In addition, Hartselle residents will get a break on electric costs: TVA's wholesale fuel cost adjustment for January will decrease by six percent. Compared to the rates that went into effect October 1, the average household in Hartselle will save about \$7.27 per month. However, Sittason adds, there were base rate increases

in April and October this year, and so the average household that uses the exact same amount of electricity this winter as last winter will pay \$25.39 over last year's electricity costs.

"This decrease in the fuel cost adjustment is good – it beats another increase – but comparatively speaking from this year to last year, the prices are still up," Sittason explains. "It is still important to continue to conserve energy as much as possible."

TVA implemented the fuel cost adjustment in late 2006 when fuel costs spiked after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The adjustment is part of HU customers' electric bills, and can go up or down, depending on quarterly increases or decreases in fuel and purchased power costs.

TVA Fuel Cost Adjustment for January: -6%

The FCA affects only the electric portion of your HU bill. It is adjusted quarterly and can be a credit or debit to allow TVA to recover, when necessary, increases in purchased power and fuel-related costs. The FCA for October was 16.9%.

Longhorn Pass Extension & CSX Bridge Near Completion

A long-awaited, badly needed project for the citizens of Hartselle is about to begin construction, says Director of the Hartselle Department of Development Jeff Johnson. Construction of the Longhorn Pass Extension and the new CSX Bridge to replace the Hammitt Street Bridge will begin in early 2009.

For many years, the single lane, wooden trestle Hammitt Street Bridge has been the only above-grade crossing over the railroad tracks in Hartselle. The 80-year-old bridge has a weight limit of 6,000 pounds and is not suitable for emergency vehicle traffic; school buses, fire trucks and ambulances cannot cross the bridge.



In early 2009, Longhorn Pass will be extended 1,500 feet across Railroad Street up to the new CSX bridge, 200 feet south of the old Hammitt Street Bridge. The new bridge will tie into Georgia Street on the east side of the tracks.

The new concrete structure bridge is designed with safety in mind, says Johnson, and will better handle the intermittent flow of traffic when, 36 times a day, trains travel through downtown.

Work on this project began in 1999, and an agreement with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) was signed Nov. 21, 2002. That agreement stipulated that ALDOT would fund up to \$1.5 million to replace the bridge and build a new connecting roadway.

Since 2002, Hartselle has completed engineering studies, drawings and specs, which were reviewed and approved by ALDOT late last year. The city then purchased rights-of-way from four private property owners, including Hartselle Utilities, and HU completed utility relocations to make way for the new roadway. After insurance issues were worked out with CSX, the project was ready to bid.

Reed Contracting Services submitted the low bid, for \$1,267,935 says Johnson. "Subject to review of the bid documents by ALDOT, if there are no problems we expect ALDOT to sign a contract in 60-90 days," he explains. Reed Contracting will have 90 working days – not including weekends, holidays or weather days – to complete the 1,500 feet of connecting roadway and the new bridge. Johnson says, "This project took 10 years to negotiate and plan, and the actual construction should be completed by mid-summer 2009."

CSX is the owner of the old Hammitt Street Bridge, and will continue to be responsible for the maintenance, and ultimately, the

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Levelized Billing

For HU customers who are tired of being surprised by the amount of their monthly utility bill, HU Customer Service Manager Terri Harris encourages them to consider Levelized Billing, which gives customers a consistent bill from month to month.

With Levelized Billing, a customer's rolling 12-month average is calculated each month; if the total is more than 20 percent higher or lower than the previous month it is "capped" and the difference is made up in later months when usage has not jumped or dropped so dramatically.

While each month's bill is not exactly the same amount, it is guaranteed not to change more than 20 percent from month to month – which protects customers from the recent volatility in electric and natural gas rates, Harris explains. There is no "reconciliation month," because the 12-month average is recalculated each month.

Customers who are currently enrolled in Budget Billing may switch to Levelized Billing without paying the normal annual reconciliation calculation. For more information and to request an enrollment form, call HU at (256) 773-3340 or send an email to Customer Service Manager Terri Harris at tharris@hartselleutilities.org.



Check Out Our New Website

The Hartselle Utilities website has a new look – and more information about HU programs and services. If you have a question about our services, board meetings, scheduled outages, work in progress, energy efficiency tips or staff contact information, visit www.hartselleutilities.org.

Operation Warm

The cold winter months are often hard on those with fixed incomes. This fall, HU Customer Service Manager Terri Harris says that she has noticed more customers having difficulty paying their bills than normal, and predicts that this winter the problems will get worse. "We do have energy programs that provide assistance to households who qualify," Harris says.

One program is Operation Warm, which provides assistance to the elderly, people with disabilities and families with a health crisis. The Community Action Partnership of North Alabama provides resources to families and individuals in these situations and administers the Operation Warm Program. This program is available to customers who meet Community Action eligibility criteria. Hartselle Utilities accepts donations and forwards them to Community Action.

Hartselle Utilities customers can make a one-time donation to Operation Warm, or choose to add a specific amount to their utility bill each month. To do so, complete the form below and return it to Hartselle Utilities. For more information, call 773-3340 or email Terri Harris at tharris@hartselleutilities.org.

For more information on Community Action's assistance programs, call 260-3122.

To support Operation Warm, complete this form and return to Hartselle Utilities

- Please add \$_____ to my monthly Hartselle Utilities (HU) bill. I understand that I have the right to stop this contribution at any time by giving HU written notice, and that the amount I have indicated will be added to my monthly bill until such notice is received.
- I'm already an Operation Warm partner. Please increase my monthly donation to \$_____.
- Please add a ONE-TIME donation of \$_____ to my bill. I understand that the amount I have indicated will be added to one of my monthly bills.

Name _____ Account Number _____
Address _____ Phone Number _____
Customer Signature _____

**Operation Warm is administered by Community Action Partnership of North Alabama, Inc.
All monies donated go directly to those in need.**

Bridge, continued from front

removal of the bridge. Johnson points out that because CSX, and not the city, owns the bridge, the city has never been responsible for any maintenance or inspections to the structure.

The entire ten-year project, including design, utility relocations, rights-of-way purchase and construction will cost a little over the \$1.5 million originally projected. Federal funds have or will cover \$1.2 million; \$300,000 comes from state funding, and the remaining balance estimated at \$18,000 will be paid by the city of Hartselle.

"We are very pleased on the bid amount from Reed Contracting," Johnson says. "The City of Hartselle would like to thank everyone who has participated in the past, present and future to have this come to realization, especially past and current mayors, councils, and senators Tommy Ed Roberts, Arthur Orr and Rep. Ronald Grantland."

Oden Career Spans 27 Years at HU



Charlie Oden

HU Warehouseman Charlie Oden will retire in December after 27 years. During that time, he has worked in every field department at HU, and spent the majority of his time at the Water, Sewer and Gas Warehouse.

During his career Oden helped to revamp the storage and daily operations of the warehouse, including the transfer from hand-generated records to computer-generated inventory systems.

According to HU Purchasing Agent Linda Huskey, Oden knew the material numbers of several hundred items by heart. "Charlie was the man to go to if you needed to know a number," Huskey says. "We are going to miss that!"

Holiday Schedule

Hartselle Utilities will be closed on the following days:

Wednesday, December 24

Thursday, December 25

Wednesday, December 31

Thursday, January 1

We wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday season!



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1010 Sparkman St NW
Hartselle, AL 35640
256-773-3340

Hartselle Utilities

www.HartselleUtilities.com