

The Hartselle Connection

A Publication of Hartselle Utilities — Serving Hartselle's People, Building for Hartselle's Future

Lower Gas Prices This Winter

The cost Hartselle Utilities pays for natural gas has dropped 32 percent over last year, says HU Accounting & Finance Manager Bob Sittason, and this savings will be passed directly to HU natural gas customers.

"Prices have gone down because gas wells in the Gulf are back at pre-Katrina status; they've completely recovered," Sittason explains. "Prices are driven by supply and demand, and the supply is adequate now, where it wasn't last year. Last October, rates were at the highest I've seen."

Sittason tries to purchase or lock in the price for 80 percent of HU's projected natural gas usage before the winter months.

So far, this season has been colder than average, Sittason says, and usage may be higher than last year, when the weather was much warmer than anticipated.

"Even though rates are going down 32 percent," he cautions, "every customer's natural gas bill may not be exactly 32 percent less. Usage will determine the final cost to customers, depending on the weather and their lifestyle."

Holiday Schedule

Hartselle Utilities will be closed on the following days:

Friday, December 22
Monday, December 25
Friday, December 29
Monday, January 1

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

Hartselle Utilities

Delivering Meals – And Smiles

Hartselle Utilities General Manager Ferrell Vest strongly believes that as a public utility, HU should promote community involvement.

"We have a responsibility to this community," he explains. "Fortunately, our folks buy into that."

And HU employees do volunteer their time and money. From donations through the annual United Way Campaign to time spent last year on the Gulf Coast helping with cleanup efforts after Hurricane Katrina, employees are encouraged to help others who are less fortunate.

Once a month, at least two HU employees deliver boxed lunches for Meals on Wheels, which feeds about 400 people each day in the Decatur/Hartselle area. Sherry Chenault, HU accounting clerk, and Katie Randolph, HU accountant, volunteer every month.

"We have 10 people on our route," says Chenault. "And most of them are starved for attention. Often, we are the only outside contact these people have all day."

Since most Meals on Wheels clients are alone during the day, volunteers are asked to watch for any sign that something is wrong.

"One lady on our route is Mary Nix, who has had a stroke," says Chenault. "One day when we arrived with her food, we found her on the ground where her walker had fallen over. If we had not been there, she would have been like that all day," explains Chenault.

Meals on Wheels is funded entirely by donations – the local program does not receive federal funding – and relies on volunteers to deliver food.

"The best part about volunteering for Meals on Wheels is seeing the smiles," says Chenault. "You walk away very grateful for what you have."

Over 10 years ago, HU employees used their own money to help a needy family during the holidays. Their plan was just to buy groceries, explains Freida Warden, HU customer service manager. However, the employees delivering the food realized that the family of eight did not have



Each month, HU employees Sherry Chenault, right, and Katie Randolph, center, deliver lunch to Mary Nix through the Meals on Wheels program.

enough money to buy presents for the children.

The next day the employees returned with arms full of brightly wrapped toys and clothes, all purchased with spur-of-the-moment contributions from HU employees.

That began HU's tradition of sponsoring a needy family or child during the holidays. Employees make donations during monthly safety meetings, and the money is set aside until December. Throughout the year, employees will raise between \$300 and \$350.

This year, explains Chenault, employees worked with Head Start to select two children.

"Head Start often tells us to just buy clothes, because the family needs so much that toys are not a priority," Chenault explains. "That just breaks your heart to think about."

Although they concentrate on clothing, she explains, they also buy at least two toys for each child. "We penny pinch," Chenault laughs. "Other employees are always amazed at how much the money we raised buys."

"I'm thankful that Hartselle Utilities lets us do this," Chenault continues. "When you work full-time, it's hard to be involved in the community. But everybody needs to do something like this to make you realize how lucky we are."

Community Action Coming to HU

Beginning in late December, the Community Action Partnership of North Alabama will again set up an office at Hartselle Utilities.

Community Action administers the federally-funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and *Operation Warm*, both designed to provide one-time assistance for low-income residents to help pay heating and cooling bills. The programs also help keep utilities from being turned off during a health crisis. Clients who meet income criteria and bring all the necessary documentation can get qualified that day for assistance with their utility bill.

"We are so happy to continue this program this year," says Freida Warden, HU customer service manager. "This is such a blessing for our customers who have problems traveling to Decatur for appointments at the Community Action office. When they set up the office here last year, it was a hit from day one," she explained.

Community Action staff have not yet chosen the day of the week or the exact start date of the Hartselle office, but that information will be publicized as soon as a decision is made. Warden says she expects Community Action to continue coming to Hartselle Utilities until at least February. For more information, call the Community Action's Decatur office at 355-7843.

Water Pressure Problems Corrected

About 500 HU water customers in the area near the high school will have higher water pressure beginning the first week of December, says HU Water System Operator Steve Terry.

"Due to low pressure problems in certain areas of town, HU began to make changes in the system in the 1990s to correct the problem," Terry said. "However, it is rare that a utility is able to increase water pressure. The affected area of this project is the final phase of the new high level district service area."

Letters were mailed to every customer in the area in early September, letting them know of the upcoming change in the water pressure. The letters advised home and business owners to have water pipes inspected for possible problems, because a sudden increase in water pressure could cause leaks in older plumbing.

"The increase in water pressure will be noticeable. Before, residents couldn't take a shower and run their sprinkler or wash dishes at the same time, for example," Terry explains. "Also, this will improve water flow during fire situations – which will improve safety."

South Gate Station to Begin Operations Dec. 1

HU's new South Gate Station, which will allow HU to serve new natural gas customers in southern Hartselle, provide backup to the North Gate Station and help in meeting peak winter loads, is expected to be online by December 1.

A major part of the project was building three encasements under Interstate 65 to connect HU's system with Southern Natural Gas. One of the encasements now houses the natural gas line. The other two encasements are reserved for water and sewer to allow for future industrial growth expected east of I-65.

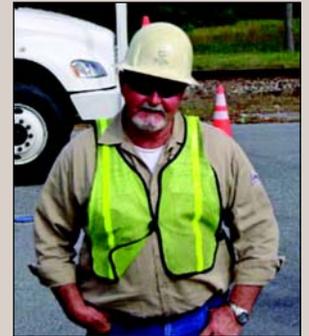
According to Wayne Roberson, HU Engineering services manager, several industries have looked at Hartselle recently.

"Representatives from one company that would bring 300 new jobs to our area visited during the summer," Roberson said. "This particular company is a heavy gas user. Having the plan for this already in place might help sway the company to site here."

Happy Retirement to Gary Lorange

Hartselle Utilities says good-bye and God Bless to Electric Foreman Gary Lorange, who retired October 31. Lorange joined HU in 1977 as an apprentice lineman, and worked in the Electric Department during his entire career with HU. Lorange and his wife, Sheila, have two children: son, Judd, and daughter, Heather, and one granddaughter, Ellie.

We wish him the best of luck, and many happy days hunting, fishing, and spending time with his granddaughter.



We Need Your Help for Operation Warm!

The cold winter months are often hard on those with fixed incomes. *Operation Warm* provides assistance to the elderly, people with disabilities and families with a health crisis.

HU customers can make a one-time donation to *Operation Warm*, or choose to add a specific amount to their utility bill each month. "If each customer could give as little as a dollar a month to *Operation Warm*, it will help so much," says HU Customer Service Manager Freida Warden.

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

- Please add \$_____ to my monthly Hartselle Utilities bill. I understand that I have the right to stop this contribution at any time by giving Hartselle Utilities 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.**