As our industry continues to shape this country’s energy future, we’re not resting on our laurels. We’re examining future success in areas such as exceeding consumer expectations and welcoming a diverse workforce — and putting systems in place to achieve that success. **BY DAVE MCCURDY**

**AHEAD OF THE GAME**

The energy portfolio of the United States will have natural gas as a foundation for the foreseeable future and beyond. Our customers rely on its comfort and affordability. We have an abundance of this clean resource and a vast delivery system — both objects of envy throughout the world. But we are not an industry that rests on its laurels. We are examining future success from every angle and putting systems in place to achieve it.

The American Gas Association is shaping the future of energy use in this country and surveying the landscape for new opportunities. At the direction of our Board — and under the leadership of First Vice Chairman Pierce Norton II, president and CEO of ONE Gas Inc. in Tulsa, Oklahoma — member company executives have formed a Scenario Planning Steering Committee to examine factors affecting our companies and our industry, including environmental concerns, economics, technology and innovation, and the emergence of new consumer expectations formed by social media and information technology.

Not surprisingly, some utilities are already ahead of the game. In this issue of *American Gas*, we highlight incredible innovations in customer service. Rightly so, these companies understand that they exist alongside Amazon, Uber and Snapchat when it comes to user experience. They have addressed this opportunity head-on, combining energy use monitoring, paying bills and other services into a positive and seamless interaction for their customers. As the article notes, these companies are continuing to deepen existing customer relationships and forming new relationships that are built to last.

Also in this issue is an inspiring article about welcoming women and minorities into the energy workforce in the coming decades. I encourage you to read some of the heartwarming tales of natural gas utility employees who have been embraced and supported by their companies and communities and will enjoy a promising career in our industry.

AGA Chairman Ralph LaRossa has been talking throughout his term about the opportunity to hire a diverse and inclusive workforce that will upgrade and maintain the energy infrastructure of the 21st century. Ralph is adamant that our future depends on having an engaged workforce in which everyone is appreciated and respected for their experiences, values and perspectives. His passion is palpable and is having an impact across the industry. AGA member companies are engaged in their communities, recruiting and training workers and providing a promising career path. AGA is helping to cultivate new natural gas workers throughout the country with our ongoing relationship with the Center for Energy Workforce Development and the AGA Scholarship that has been covered widely in these pages.

We are also telling the stories of natural gas utility employees throughout the country and sending the message that delivering natural gas to customers provides an exciting and rewarding career. I hope you have seen the #MyNatGasJob campaign on AGA’s social media platforms and at mynatgasjob.tumblr.com.

Natural gas is available and affordable. The infrastructure is safe and reliable. Our customers and employees share our commitment to service. We are constantly innovating and planning for the future. These are the ingredients for success, and we are grateful to have you with us on this journey. ✨

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