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## FINDING A NEW CAREER DELIVERING PROPANE

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After running a residential masonry company near Hollister, Calif., for 30 years, Patty Gere was ready for a change. So she did something unexpected for most single women in their mid-50s—she sold her company and started a new career delivering propane.

“I drove by Dassel’s Petroleum, which was about five minutes from my house, and saw the ‘drivers wanted’ sign. I thought for giggles I would apply,” Gere said. “I just got tired of sitting behind my desk. Once my kids were grown, I just wanted to be outside.”

Although she had no knowledge of propane, she did have a commercial driver’s license. “I was pleasantly surprised, (actually shocked!), when Lloyd Pope, the general manager of Dassel’s, responded to my resume.”

In October, she celebrated her one-year anniversary as a bobtail driver for Dassel’s delivering and filling propane tanks for commercial customers, who in turn fill cylinder tanks for RVs, mobile catering trucks, and barbecue tanks. She also delivers to residential customers.

Dassel’s, which has been in business since 1939, serves customers across California’s Central Coast and the Central San Joaquin Valley.

“It’s been a great ride. It’s a very, very awesome company to work for,” Gere said. “My truck carries over 2200 gallons of propane, which I empty daily, and sometimes more. I like to think I help keep our customers warm, fed, clean, and dry—one tank at a time!”

In addition to driving that bobtail, she also drives Pinky, the company’s pink breast cancer awareness truck, which carries 2600 gallons. “I do love to drive the pink truck. People ask, ‘Did they buy this pink truck for you?’ ‘I’m not sure about nationally, but I am the only woman driver at Dassel’s. I take that role quite seriously and with a great deal of pride,” she said.

“They had never had a woman driver. I think they were as nervous as I was at first. From day one, though, everyone from upper management to the other drivers have made me feel like part of the family. I can ask any one of my coworkers for help with a situation or advice on how to handle a tricky delivery.”

One of the most challenging parts of her job is the physical aspect. While the commercial deliveries are fairly easy since they’re generally on level and solid ground, she said the residential deliveries can be quite physically challenging.

“I’m physically in the best shape I’ve been in years,” Gere said. “I just wanted to be in a physical job, and this just hit the nail on the head.”

“I play ‘Where’s Waldo?’ every day—‘Where’s the tank?’ Understandably, some clients prefer to keep their propane tanks out of sight, which means you might have to pull the hose quite a distance. The hose on my truck reaches over 100 feet, and pulling up a hill, or around obstacles such as landscaping, lighting, and plumbing fixtures, can be quite tough! I’ve had to climb fences and navigate slippery slopes in adverse conditions.”

Originally, Gere worked full-time, Monday through Friday. After moving near Yosemite to be closer to her daughter, she now works Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays—commuting 2½ hours and staying with friends.

Working weekends means she has regular deliveries and is the backup, on-call driver often working 10- to 12-hour days. But the schedule gives her more time with her family.

“My daughter lives near me, so I see her and her family almost daily. My son lives in Utah, and we get together a couple of times a year. I have horses, and spend a good deal of my summer riding in the mountains and camping. I recently purchased a pretty challenged property (16 acres) so I’ve been busy making it habitable and getting ready for my first winter in the mountains.”

Gere is also a licensed security guard and has provided horse-mounted security services in the past for music festivals such as Coachella. In addition, as a commissioned notary, she provides mobile notary services as needed in her community.

“I can honestly say I have enjoyed making this job my new career,” Gere said. “As long as I can keep pulling the hose, I’ll look forward to each new day.” — Karen VanAsdale

