



Defying Expectations: Patty Gere's Journey in the Propane Industry

Gere's career from masonry to propane delivery embodies resilience, adaptability & a passion for challenges

BY CHRISTINA MILLER

Patty Gere's career journey is a testament to resilience, adaptability and a deep-seated passion for overcoming challenges. Transitioning from running a successful masonry company to becoming a seasoned propane delivery driver at Dassel's Energy, an EDP company, Gere found herself drawn to a new adventure fueled by her love for driving and the outdoors.

Reflecting on her typical day, Patty shared insights into the dynamic nature of her role: "It depends on the season. In the fall and winter, when demand for gas is high, my day typically starts before 6 a.m. and can run well into overtime, depending on customer needs. Spring and summer, the demand is much lower, so I enjoy a much lighter day and easy driving."

Her commitment to safety and reliable service is evident as she checks tank integrity and ensures system safety after interruptions, embodying the company's ethos. Everything she does in the field is documented, which is turned in each night.

Overcoming Challenges & Embracing Growth

In her five-year journey as a bobtail driver for Dassel's Energy,

Gere encountered both personal and professional challenges. Initially, she felt the pressure to prove herself.

"In the beginning, I felt I needed to prove I could be as fast and as strong as my co-drivers," she said. This drive to excel, however, led her to realize the importance of pacing herself and seeking guidance from her managers and dispatchers, who became her biggest supporters. Gere's co-drivers also played a crucial role in her development, always ready to offer guidance and assistance, even on their days off. Through these challenges, Gere learned valuable lessons in self-care, teamwork and the significance of a supportive work environment.

As Gere navigated through her role as a bobtail driver, her challenges evolved, transforming into opportunities for personal and professional growth. Some of her unique contributions to delivery operations include volunteering to be on-call for weekends and holidays, showcasing her dedication and versatility.

Over time, Gere honed her skills, becoming a more confident and efficient driver. Reflecting on her growth, she shared, "I am a much better driver than I was in the beginning, and now



to complete on a regular basis.”

For those contemplating a career in propane delivery or similar fields, Gere's thoughts on switching careers might resonate. “Delivering propane wasn't on my radar, but I was passionate about driving,” she said. “I wanted to work outside, and I wanted a job that had a physical side to it, and I also wanted to be home at night.”

Those with similar priorities and values might find this kind of role to be the perfect fit. It's not just about delivering propane; it's about ensuring safety, providing excellent customer service and being part of a community that truly appreciates hard work and dedication.

‘Pinky’

One of the highlights of Gere's career has been her involvement in her community, particularly her opportunity to drive the pink breast cancer awareness truck, affectionately known as “Pinky.” This experience not only highlighted her role in the company but also underscored Dassel's commitment to social causes.

“Customers thought the company bought it for me,” said Gere. “You know, new woman driver, new pink truck!” Gere's joke reveals the positive attention and camaraderie it has fostered. “It has the longest wheelbase in the fleet, and as long as I stayed on flat land, it was my truck of choice. But once I started working in mountainous terrain, I prefer our shorter wheel-base trucks that can turn on a dime.”

Balancing Work & Life: A New Chapter Near Yosemite

Gere's work schedule underwent significant changes when she moved closer to her daughter near Yosemite. Describing this transition, she recalls, “When I applied for and was hired on in October of 2018, I was upfront about the possibility of moving away from Hollister. But what I didn't realize is how very much I would enjoy this job.”

Gere found fulfillment in her role at Dassel's Energy, where she not only excelled but also contributed significantly. The company, recognizing her commitment, accommodated her move, offering a reduced workweek during slow seasons and more days during peak demand.

“It's a win-win situation for both me and the company,” said Gere. This arrangement not only benefited Gere's personal life, allowing her quality time with her family near and far during short summer workweeks, but also ensured her continued dedication to her job during long winter workweeks.

Empowering Women in Male-Majority Industries

Reflecting on her experiences, Gere offers invaluable advice to women considering or already working in industries largely comprised of men, such as propane delivery. She stresses the importance of clarity about job expectations and the ability to balance work with family life.

“A positive attitude and confidence in yourself is crucial,” said

very little intimidates me in the field.” This evolution highlights Gere's resilience and determination to excel in the propane industry, proving that perseverance and a positive mindset can lead to significant achievements.

Gere's pioneering role as the first woman driver did not go unnoticed, both within and outside Dassel's Energy. Her presence challenged the traditional dynamics of the field and paved the way for more inclusive practices. “I am extremely proud to be the first woman driver at Dassel's,” she states, reflecting on her initial goal of making it through her first winter and her surprise at how quickly five years have passed. “I continue to enjoy my job immensely, and although it is a physically demanding job, I hope to continue to deliver for as long as I physically can.”

Gere's tenure in propane delivery has offered her a front-row seat to the sector's ongoing evolution and — more specifically — Dassel's evolution. From advancements in vehicle technology to improvements in routing software, she has witnessed firsthand how these changes have enhanced efficiency and safety. The industry is not static; it's constantly evolving.

“The fleet is continually being upgraded, the new trucks have improved safety equipment and the software that creates the routing has made our deliveries more efficient,” said Gere. “We have excellent on-site mechanics here at Dassel's that keep our trucks running and in compliance with all the federal regulations and inspections. Safety is first and foremost for all drivers and administrative personnel, and we have monthly safety meetings and online training courses that we are required

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Gere. "And never think you're too old to start something new." Her words resonate with aspiring women professionals, highlighting the significance of self-assurance and adaptability in navigating challenging environments. Numerous challenges will come, but so will victories.

When asked about leveraging her unique perspective as a woman in a traditionally male-dominated field, Gere emphasized her strong work ethic and determination, stating, "I don't think my success here at Dassel's is because I am a woman." She credits her upbringing and personal values for her achievements, highlighting her desire for self-sufficiency and resilience in the face of challenges. Gere's approach reflects her belief in being true to oneself and seizing opportunities based on merit and dedication.

"I never expected any special concessions here because I am a woman," said Gere. "I just wanted to be myself. I found that opportunity here at Dassel's Energy, and for that I'm grateful."

Favorites & Least Favorites

Gere's genuine enthusiasm for her work shines through her descriptions as she shares her favorite aspects, including experiencing nature's beauty and diversity. "I have many favorites, like watching the seasons change," said Gere. "I get to see sunrises and sunsets, orchards blooming and crops growing. Customers share their fruits and veggies from their gardens."

Gere expressed her joy in connecting with nature and people through her work. "I see all kinds of wildlife. The smell of salty air and pine trees. I go deep into majestic redwood groves and deliver to big ranches and farms. Each day is different from the one before."

However, Gere admits to challenges, such as navigating tricky driveways and automatic gates, showcasing the practical complexities of her role. "My least favorite part? Getting my truck around winding driveways and automatic gates that have a short timer." Despite these challenges, Gere's passion for her job remains unwavering, driven by the joy of exploration and connection with nature and people.

A Trailblazer in Every Season

Patty Gere's journey in the propane industry is a testament to the power of passion, perseverance and a positive mindset. From navigating challenging work schedules to embracing personal and professional growth, Gere has demonstrated resilience and determination in every aspect of her career. She has paved the way for others by embodying strength, integrity and a relentless pursuit of excellence. Her advice to aspiring professionals echoes her own journey, emphasizing the importance of self-confidence, adaptability and a clear understanding of one's goals.

Gere's story is not just about delivering propane; it's about embracing diversity, seizing opportunities for growth and finding joy in every season of life and work. ▀

Christina Miller is associate editor for Butane-Propane News magazine.