

## SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR: CYLINDER EXPRESS, BATTLE CREEK, IA GOING “ALL IN” FOR THEIR CUSTOMERS

When Cylinder Express owners Henry and Bev Jessen joined the IGIA early in 2014, they didn't just dip their toes in the water, they dove in headfirst. They immediately joined the Ribbon Sponsor program at the red level, donated product, sponsored events, participated in the weekly legislative call and have been regular participants in Association events as well as maintained a reputation for delivering superior customer service to IGIA retail members.

In addition, Bev Jessen and sons Jordan and Jacob attended the IGIA Leadership Institute in 2016. Bev participates in the IGIA Women in the Industry Group. And most recently, Cylinder Express became a sponsor of the Iowa Best Bagger Competition at the Iowa State Fair. “If we need something, we just have to call, and the Jessens are eager to help,” says IGIA President Michelle Hurd. “I'm happy to see Cylinder Express receive this award for all they do for our industry.”

In light of the Jessens' exemplary track record, Cylinder Express was “a natural” for the 2016 IGIA Supplier of the Year award when considering nominations, according to the IGIA selection committee.

When it comes to the motivation behind their commitment, according to Henry, “We feel we need to belong to and support the associations our customers belong to, and if you're going to be in it, you need to be all in to get the most out of it.”

The dedication and devotion that Cylinder Express demonstrates for its retail customers, consumers, and the grocery and convenience industries has landed the Iowa company a place in the Iowa Grocery Industry Association Hall of Fame as the 2016 Supplier of the Year. As such they will be honored at the Hall of Fame Dinner on Thursday, October 27 at the Sheraton West Des Moines.

Henry and Bev say by belonging, their dues and ribbon sponsorship are contributing financially to support the programs that benefit their customers.

“I've always believed you can't just take, you have to give back too,” adds Henry. “It's important to us that our customers see that



(Right to left) Bev Jessen, Jordan Alm and Jacob Jessen of Cylinder Express, pose for a photo with Tom Warner of the Iowa Lottery at the Best Bagger Competition at the Iowa State Fair. Cylinder Express was an event sponsor.

we are members and that we've made this commitment for them. We have had some of our customers comment and even thank us for participating. That's what we are hoping for.”

Cylinder Express has been in business since 1993 and is a subsidiary of Johnson Propane Heating & Cooling Inc. located in Battle Creek, Iowa, and founded in 1945. The operation is an Iowa-based propane, cylinder exchange and HVAC dealer with nearly 850 Cylinder Express exchange locations at retailers throughout Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota. The company provides propane gas as well as new and used heating and cooling equipment from its new plant, which was built in Battle Creek in 2003. In addition to providing 20-pound grill cylinders, Cylinder Express also offers 33-pound forklift cylinders. They deliver their products to customers from five locations in western Iowa—Anthon, Battle Creek, Correctionville, Odebolt and Schleswig.

“In the propane business, bigger isn't better,” Henry says. “Our compact size allows us to move swiftly to fill our customers' needs as they arise and get products to them quickly. Our retail customers can't sell from an empty cage. And, unlike our larger competitors, who deliver on a set schedule regardless of demand, we make sure our customers never run out.”

According to Henry, running out of propane can mean more than a lost sale for his retail

customers. “If that consumer is grilling and heads to the store for a propane tank and the cage is empty, he or she will head to a different store. While they are there, they will probably pick up steaks or burgers, buns and chips or other items they need for the occasion,” he explains. “This is a chance for the competitive store to make a positive impression and inspire that individual to return. Ultimately that could mean a lost customer for the retailer all because they ran out of propane.”

“Our customers are more than just a number to us,” he adds. “We are going to get them whatever they need whenever they need it.”

This unwavering commitment to service also extends to the community. The Jessens participate in and support multiple community groups including scouts, the local fire department and EMS, church, the Horn Memorial Auxiliary, Ida Sheltered Industries and Ida Grove County Country Club to name a few.

“We are honored and humbled by this award,” says Henry Jessen. “It belongs to everyone on our staff, from those who answer the phones and take orders, to our delivery drivers who fill cages, to the guys who fill and paint the cylinders, to the guys who set up the accounts, to Bev and I who rally the troops each day. We don't feel like we've done anything special. It's just the right way to do business.”