



Long, transparent tubes containing water-filled trays with solar reflectors aim sunlight into Hyperlight's heat-collection element.

tric utilities also spent almost \$695 million on conservation programs that deliver weatherization services and equipment repair or replacement—often at little or no cost—to low-income customers. Finally, utilities played a major role in fundraising and providing administrative assistance to private charities that raised \$20 million from utility employees, shareholders, and the public in 2012.

Utility funding of low-income customer assistance has held fairly steady over the past few years, while federal LIHEAP funding has dropped significantly. In 2010, for example, federal LIHEAP funding peaked at \$5.1 billion, while utility low-income customer assistance totaled just over \$3.7 billion.

Bruce McDowell, AGA's managing director of policy analysis, said lower natural gas prices have helped offset some of the lost LIHEAP funding, and a spring 2013 survey showed that the number of customers whose utility service had been disconnected had fallen by 8.2 percent compared to the prior year. However, this year's especially cold winter could reverse some of that progress.

McDowell said the AGA will continue to advocate for more LIHEAP funding, but "given the current budget environment, LIHEAP funding is at risk, particularly any increase."

—J.P.T.

ISSUES

Expanding the Portfolio

SoCalGas invests in solar thermal energy

Aiming to help customers save money, conserve energy, and support California's environmental goals, Southern California Gas Co. has teamed up with the California Energy Commission to provide \$2 million in funding to support the commercialization of a new solar thermal energy technology called Hyperlight.

Currently in development at the San Diego State University Center for Energy Sustainability, in Brawley, Calif., the Hyperlight technology uses an innovative, low-cost design to harness the sun's energy. The design features a series of long, transparent tubes containing water-filled trays with solar reflectors that aim sunlight onto a heat-collection element. The system produces high-temperature steam that can serve a range of commercial and agricultural business applications.

Hyperlight's design represents a reinvention of solar thermal, according to John King, CEO of Hyperlight Energy. The approach allows for ultra-low-cost construction using space-efficient,

from last year. The state's Act 13 oil and gas law, implemented in 2012, charges drillers \$40,000 to \$60,000 for each gas well, depending on the price of gas. Revenues go to affected state agencies such as the Department of Environmental Protection, as well as to local governments and environmental and infrastructure projects. Some 1,300 new wells were drilled in 2013.

Mexico plans to hold auctions for **five gas pipelines worth \$2.25 billion**. Three would import gas from Texas and Arizona, while two would transport gas within Mexico. Officials at state-owned energy company Pemex have estimated that Mexico could soon triple U.S. gas imports to 3 Bcf/d, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. But Mexico hopes to boost its own production to 10.4 Bcf/d by 2025 to become a net exporter, according to the *Latin American Herald Tribune*.

A new survey by Lloyd's Register in London indicates that major ports around the world are either planning for or anticipating the **wide-scale development of LNG bunkering**. In its LNG Bunkering Infrastructural Survey 2014, Lloyd's surveyed 22 ports worldwide. Results showed that 59 percent of ports surveyed have specific plans for LNG bunkering infrastructure, and 76 percent of ports believe that LNG bunkering operations will begin at their sites within five years. By 2020, ports expect that 13 percent of bunkers supplied will be LNG facilities; by 2025, they expect that number to rise to 24 percent.

Excellence Inc., a family-owned vehicle converter in Madison, Ala., *Continued on page 8*

pipeline

DIGEST

Continued from page 7
has produced the world's **first CNG ambulance approved by the Ford Quality Vehicle Modifier program**. Custom-built for the city of Bossier, La., fire department, the ambulance features a medium-duty Ford F-650 chassis. According to Excellance, the vehicle averages 7 miles per gallon, saving 50 percent over gas- and diesel-powered engines. Its 58 gas-gallon-equivalent fuel capacity provides a conservative range of 315 miles to the tank. Excellance is promoting the ambulance to agencies located in areas with CNG fueling stations.

Classic Chevrolet, the **nation's largest Chevrolet dealership, has opened its own CNG fueling station** to help

low-impact infrastructure, resulting in cost savings and emissions reductions.

Why would a natural gas company like SoCalGas make an investment in a technology that could potentially reduce gas consumption? "As the largest gas distribution company in the United States, our long-term mission is to help our customers achieve safe, reliable, and reasonable-cost energy use," Patrick Lee, senior vice president of customer service, innovation, and business strategy, told *American Gas*. "We are pleased to support technologies like Hyperlight that supplement natural gas use while reducing emissions."

As California moves to raise the statewide use of renewable energy from its current level of 20 percent to the Renewable Portfolio Standard target of 33 percent by 2020, natural gas will continue to be a "foundational fuel," Lee added. "About 61 percent of the in-state generation is powered by natural gas. With the ramp-up to renewables, and the issues relating to intermittence, natural gas will play a significant role in ensuring that users have 24/7 access

to the energy they need."

To keep pace with California's fast-changing energy landscape, SoCalGas and other utilities must consider new ways of doing business, said Lee. "The utility trend of the future is heading toward more end-use competition. To any extent that we can offer more options to consumers to help them achieve their energy goals, that's good for the customer and it's good for us." —*Gary James*

UPDATE

It's a Start

New Jersey regulators OK one-third of a post-Sandy plan

Public Service Electric & Gas Co. has received approval for a scaled-down version of its Energy Strong plan to fortify its infrastructure against severe weather conditions.