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New England Total Energy: In It for the Long Haul

By John Vastyan

There's a company in Greenwich, CT that has, at its roots, a long history of fuel oil deliveries and thousands of appreciative customers. They've been at it for more than 80 years – with customer service that's sustained them through many decades.

The Cortese family-owned New England Total Energy offers a array of energy services including oil, diesel and

propane delivery, hydronic and HVAC installation and service as well as home energy audits; even insulation.

Founded in 1939 by Vincenzo Cortese, the family and its 60+ employees have served the needs of customers in Fairfield County, CT and Westchester, NY areas since those early years. Frank Cortese, VP, represents the family's third generation (and, yes – there's a 4th generation moving

toward industry involvement).

"We work hard – it's in our blood – and we're always looking for ways to grow and diversify," said Yolanda Cortese, Frank's Mom and president of New England Total Energy. Yolanda is the widow of Demetrio Cortese; he and Yolanda represent the second generation to operate the company; Frank is the third generation.

No longer just an oil delivery company, these days New England Total Energy (NETE) strives to meet much broader customer needs and expectations. "We want to be able to offer 'the whole package' for our customers," added Frank. "So that when a need arises with mechanical or HVAC system or – better yet – to fend-off emergencies through pre-season maintenance, we're there promptly and with the tools and experience needed to meet the challenge.

Rosalie Celestino – NETE's loyal customer for three-quarters of a century – would agree. She recalls, at the age of 12, having a crush on Frank's dad ("Yolanda was sooo lucky!") Celestino's now 83 years young, but clearly remembers how impressed she was with Demitrio and all of his employees. "Their work ethic impressed me, so much so that when I went to work at Hubba-Hubba, our family restaurant [in 1951], I wanted to work just as hard as they did.

"The family's held up their good reputation through the years," added Celestino. "They're all such great people, dedicated to their work, honest, humble and ethical in every way." You'll soon learn more from Celestino – who recalls carrying fuel oil up (a big improvement to firewood) to their second story apartment back in the 1950s.

Employees? Well, more like family

"It requires a commitment on our part to stay abreast of the latest technology, and in hiring people who have the right character and technical aptitude, people who take pride in their work and also in providing the level of customer service that our customers have come to appreciate," continued Frank. "These are the things that contribute to and build a company's good reputation in the community. We now have so many long-term employees that they've simply become an extension of the family."

"We're in it for the long haul," added Yolanda. "We also devote a lot of time and resources to engage and train our staff. This shows them that it's not entirely



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about customer service; it's about their well-being, too. After all, they're the ones who become the face of our business day and night."

NETE hires additional part-time drivers in the winter to accommodate deliveries. And, according to Frank, the company has diversified into energy auditing.

"We teach our customers how to conserve energy, even though it's going to lower the gallons of fuel we'll deliver," he explained. "For us to be an asset to customers, and a solutions provider, that's how we win and grow. Many of our customers respond favorably to the suggestion of an energy audit. It's a concept some of them have never considered."

According to NETE's energy auditing manager, Paul Scicchitano, the company does 400 to 500 energy audits annually. The result is that many homes are modernized in simple ways – through the use of LED lightbulbs, the addition of insulation, weatherization services and pre-season mechanical check-ups to enhance the operation and efficiency of mechanical equipment. They also offer blower door testing as an extension of the audit process. Occasionally, even more important things happen as a result; their technicians have prevented carbon monoxide leaks on more than a few occasions.

Jeff Quickel on "family" status

Frank stopped in at a jobsite one day where several of his technicians were working on a checklist to be completed at Greenwich Catholic School. NETE had recently completed a mechanical overhaul of the substantial hydronic and mechanical systems there, an effort that required weeks of demo and installation time.

Jeff Quickel, outside sales pro with the Randolph, MA-based manufacturer's rep firm, Emerson Swan, was there to meet him. Quickel made his rounds, beginning with Frank and the rest of the crew, with high fives and backslaps. In typical New England style, it was a rather boisterous and spirited reunion.

Reggie Minor, NETE's service manager, greeted Quickel warmly. Mike Curry, a technician who does a lot of oil work (but not on this day) introduced Quickel to his

son, Jack Curry who, after graduating high school, attended BOCE's. From the age of 15, Jack spent summers and some high school time trailing after Dad on the jobsite. He's an official apprentice for the company now.

Quickel then made his way to John Sandalidis, the field foreman who was making some adjustments to one of two Taco self-sensing pumps in the mechanical room. Teddy Griffin, another talented technician, greeted Quickel.

Finally, Jeff glanced at a smiling Brendan Galvin, eager to greet him back to the school. "Brendan!" said Quickel. "I see that things have gone well since I was last here."

Galvin – an independent electrician for years, and prior to that a union trade pro – is Director of Facilities at the school. He's served the school in that capacity for four years and, thanks to his relationship with Quickel and NETE, they've managed to upgrade and improve a wide range of mechanical and electrical systems there.



Jack Curry, apprentice technician, fine-tunes Greenwich Catholic school's pool heating system.

It's all about reliability, energy reductions

Quickel was also there to answer questions about expansions to the mechanical work there, but he had to take time to admire the progress he saw at the jobsite. He observed NETE's flawless installation of three HTP Enduro Ti 750 MBH boilers. These are new, natural gas fired, fully-modulating



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and condensing heat plants that now provide space and pool heat for the school's swim facility, gym, classrooms and admin offices; each boiler is served by a CN4-1200 NeutraSafe condensate neutralizer.

Connected to and governing operation of the boilers are two Taco SKV vertical, in-line self-sensing pumps, set for lead-lag rotation. Standing between their closed-system hydronic loop, in order for heat to serve the pool, is a 1,544 MBH titanium Taco plate-and-frame heat exchanger. Moving heat to and from the heat exchanger is a 1-HP Taco 1900 Series close-coupled, in-line pump.

"The pool heater was intentionally oversized so that the school would get a longer life out of it, and with no noticeable loss in performance or efficiency," said Quickel. "School managers made it apparent – that when heat was needed for a swim – they wanted warmth for the water as quickly as possible. Of course, this is compat-

ible with the condensing boilers, too. We wanted to make them 'cry' as much as possible" (preferring a high ΔT for maximum condensate/efficiency).

Also serving the space heat needs of a different wing in the facility – installed as an injection loop about 200 feet from the main mechanical room – are two Taco 00e ECM pumps, just feet away from two, still-in-place but fully-decommissioned, older pumps – part of the demo work yet to be completed.

"Jeff [Quickel] is our go-to hydronics genius and source of information for most of the products and technology we install," said Frank. Taco's at the top of that list. Taco's very supportive of us as we need them. We also attend their training, both online and in person. There's no better source of hydronics training." Frank has been to Taco's main plant in Cranston, RI, as have many of their installers.



Yolanda Cortese, president of New England Total Energy, and her son Frank Cortese, vice president.

Substantial jobs

Improvements to the Greenwich Catholic School's extensive mechanical systems are just the type of challenge that NETE manag-

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ers specialize in. “We have the capability and the interest to dig deeply into substantial jobs, even those with challenges that may be too complex for some mechanical contracting firms,” said Frank.

Given their appetite for complex jobs, it may be a bit of surprise for some that their business mix is 10 percent commercial, and 90 percent residential. NETE’s territory, geographically, extends about 40 miles in all

directions from Fairfield – though not into Long Island, or Manhattan.

Happy customers

According to Yolanda, it’s not uncommon for customers to express their pleasure with NETE. “Clearly, we’re in the business to stay in business. Maintaining a happy customer base and word-of-mouth referrals go well together, and they’ve become a big part of

how we build not only our reputation, but the business’ long-term success,” she said.

As customer letters and emails stream in, Yolanda or Frank occasionally display these where employees can see them. Or, they may ask for the customer’s permission to place them on the company website. An example came in recently from a customer in Stamford, CT:

“Over the last few months my forced air heating system was acting up. I called the service department at New England and they did everything to save [our] 27 year-old unit that was supposed to die years ago. After a while it just seemed silly to keep dumping parts into a unit that old, so I purchased a new, high efficiency furnace. John and Tom came and, under the supervision of Todd, tore out the old one and did a spectacular new installation. They even left me with an electric heater for the evening while we waited for a part that was found to be cracked. After all is said and done, the crew of guys that came did a great job for a more than fair price, and now its toasty in my office. Thanks N.E. Total Energy. I will refer you to all my home inspection clients and radio show listeners.”

Another happy customer is Celestino; she’s the one who, at 12 years old, was enamored with Frank’s dad. “Oh, I was just a silly girl then,” she says happily recalling some very good years. Back when NETE was known as Cortese Fuel Oil Company, Celestino recalls what a big improvement it was to heat their apartment with fuel oil, a much more comfortable heat – and a switch that meant she and her mother could carry fuel oil from barrels in the basement, by large container, up the stairs to be poured carefully into the new furnace.

The staff at New England Total Energy has good reason to celebrate their many years in business. As they grow the business, the staff expands. Yolanda recalls the early years when a single truck made fuel deliveries. Needless to say, the fleet of vehicles has grown, too.

“As the business grows, the one thing that we won’t allow to change is the quality of customer service,” said Frank. That remains intact, though when we see opportunities to improve it, you bet we will. Mom reminds us regularly that maintaining customers satisfaction is the most important aspect of our work. We’re in the business of building relationships.” **I FON**

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