



## INFORM, INSPIRE, AND MOTIVATE *with* KRISTI CHEATHAM PETTIT

MANAGER, SALES AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
CLEARWATER GAS SYSTEMS

### What inspired you to join the energy industry?

I was inspired by both my dad and grandfather. My grandfather moved my mom and family from East Texas to Eustis, Florida in the mid-1950's. He was the Right of Way Coordinator for Florida Gas Transmission. He traveled throughout the state obtaining the necessary right of ways to install the first natural gas pipeline throughout the state. My dad started working as a meter reader for Peoples Gas (then Lykes Bros) in 1976; I was in Kindergarten. Both of my parents were in the utility business as blue-collar workers and had an amazing work ethic. I used to go on "call outs" with my Dad during the winter, filling up propane tanks for the ferneries. He was in every section of the gas department in Eustis – propane, service and repair, distribution, installation– everything and never wanted to be in management. While attending University of South Florida, my Dad suggested I contact corporate office in Tampa about an internship. I was 19 years old and, for the next three summers, worked at the Corporate Communications department for Peoples Gas.

### Can you tell us about your current role?

I currently wear two hats; I'm both the Sales Manager as well as the Public Affairs Manager. I oversee four outside Sales Reps, one Inside Sales Rep, a Gas Program Specialist and our Marketing Specialist. Thankfully, our group has been working in this industry for many years and they're amazing colleagues. I negotiate our Builder/Developer agreements as well as all our franchise agreements. I am the "face" (ha-ha) of Clearwater Gas and am involved in numerous gas associations as well as community organizations acting as primary lead/contact throughout the communities we serve. I have excellent relationships with the various elected officials and key business leaders in our territory, which is crucial when any projects and gas-related opportunities arise.

### Generally, when people think of careers in the utility sector, they may think "engineer," "line worker," or "customer service representative." Your role is a unique one. Can you tell us about the significance of your role in the energy industry, especially as it pertains to the growth of our economy?

I like to tell folks that "I'm not paid to sell gas; I'm paid for my relationships which in turn equals gas growth." When I'm involved from the early stages of any project being discussed, I have a greater chance of identifying the key players, owners, and builders/developers, and being a part of the decision process to include using gas at the project. In Florida, so many people who have moved from the north just "assume" gas is available; well, as a third generation Floridian...it is not. Educating the public about our product and its benefits is a big part of my role here as well as being a part of the discussion from the beginning. As Florida is enjoying a building boom, we are assisting in job growth as well as the numerous long-term benefits of using natural gas.

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**What led you to practice sales and public relations in the energy industry in particular? What is an idea, a motto, an insight, a person, or an experience that you feel has motivated you along the way?**

My Momma said I always had a gift for gab and I never knew a stranger. I knew I wanted to use these “gifts” in my career; I didn’t know my college degree would come into play EVERY DAY in the gas industry. Growing up with the family already in it, it was a very easy (natural) path choice that continued as I moved from Peoples Gas to Clearwater Gas in May 2000. I would say that John Hamilton and Joyce Wellman Fisk were CRUCIAL mentors to me during my career at Peoples Gas as well as Wraye Grimard. John and Joyce guided my community relations and marketing skills, and Wraye Grimard is a role model for any woman in our industry, having started out as a customer service rep, worked full-time, went to college, raised children, and retired from TECO as the Gas Supply Procurement Director for all the state’s gas supply. Obviously, my parents were a huge motivating factor as I never want to disappoint my dad following in the industry and my mom has ALWAYS been my number one cheerleader...she still is today!

**Many experiences have a “click” moment. In the course of your career, can you recall a particular moment when it truly clicked for you that energy is the place to be?**

I would say that when TECO purchased Peoples Gas in June 1997 and I was asked to leave the Corporate Communications department to be promoted to Builder Sales Rep in Orlando. I homed in on the relationship/sales side and learned the stages of how to close deals.

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**What is the most memorable lesson or skill that you have learned in the energy industry?**

Respect. You never know who you’re talking to, so respecting everyone along the way is ALWAYS the best way to earn respect and show respect. With my Dad as a field worker, I will ALWAYS have a special “place” for the guys who are in the field doing the hard work, especially in this Florida heat. Treat EVERYONE EQUALLY! My dad’s mom was a citrus packer and his dad was a City of Eustis garbage collector, so I would like to think that I’ve always treated everyone equally.

**What do you look forward to most in the work that you do?**

Getting the right people together. Making the relationship connections that do not necessarily benefit me directly but knowing that I have built and maintained a network of all types of professionals at various levels in their careers whom I can rely upon to accomplish tasks and get my message out there.

*“Our industry in the state allows for all of us gas companies to work together on spreading our messages. This is far from where we just were 20 years ago, let alone several decades ago.”*

**What is a challenge that you have been proud to see the industry overcome?**

In Florida especially, it’s that natural gas is a SIGNIFICANT player now in our state’s energy diversification portfolio. Since only having natural gas in the state in the late 50’s - early 60’s, we are not an afterthought. More homeowners, developers, and builders are now bringing the idea of using gas in their projects/home to the US. Even though folks do not always think of us when deciding on energy use at various projects, I think we have made significant improvements throughout Florida in educating folks. Our industry in the state allows for all of us gas companies to work together on spreading our messages. This is far from where we just were 20 years ago, let alone several decades ago.

**What advice would you give to other women who aspire to join the energy industry, especially on the communications and development side?**

Be a sponge! Absorb as much knowledge as you can and don't be intimidated about not knowing something. Just go learn; go on a call out with a salesperson, ride with an installation crew, and help pipe a house; head to a gas leak with the distribution supervisor, and watch what they do. Since I grew up with my dad and grandad in the industry, I am 46-years-old and continue to call my dad and ask for his input on gas issues or what did he do when this happened?

**Describe the energy industry using one word, and share with us why you chose this word.**

***“EVOLVING.”***

We have become a relevant player in the energy discussions throughout the state. We have made significant progress with our elected officials, citizens, and others, sharing the benefits of gas and the technological advancements in our industry here in Florida. We are not just a fuel source, but an example of reliability, sustainability, and domestic pride!

The annual Florida's Women in Energy Leadership Forum (FWELF) aims to promote opportunities in the energy industry by recognizing the success that women leaders in the energy industry have demonstrated in growing Florida's economy and diversifying an already tremendous workforce.