

Real Napa

Cold comfort

Like a boater being pulled ever-faster down river to a roaring waterfall, my household is bracing for the first utility bills of winter.

Because recent hurricanes pumped natural gas prices sky-high, heating bills should be twice as high as last year. For October, PG&E says to expect a 71 percent jump.

Three-dollar gasoline was one shoe dropping. PG&E's mailing will be the other shoe.

While others are panicking, I'm cool. What's the problem? We'll just conserve more.

I figure if we lower the thermostat three or four notches and we all wear our fleeciery clothing indoors, we'll survive just fine.

Perhaps I'm a glutton for conservation, but cutting back is almost always music to my thrifty Yankee soul. Just thinking about hard times ahead gives me a rush.

Cheryl, wouldn't you know, is cut from a different cloth. Filmy-satin, not flannel.

She did her growing up in Southern



California. That makes her a softy. If you gave her a truth serum, I suspect she would confess to wanting our home 75 degrees all winter long.

Talk of rocketing utility bills and sacrifice have made her cranky. Recalling days in her first marriage when dollars were tight, she thinks she's already conserved enough for one lifetime.

I understand her feelings ... to a point. Is it not a fact that even the most conserving American is an energy drunkard by world standards?

Cheryl was running a tighter energy ship by the time she met me, although

I'm not sure it was purely voluntary. Zapped during an electrical outage, her thermostat would no longer go above 72.

Even 72 was more than I could handle. I'd break into a sweat and do a veritable striptease every time I visited. Your house is positively Amazonian, I'd said.

When we married, we negotiated a 68-degree daytime setting, with the temperature allowed to free-fall at night.

People who have known and loved a winter household in the 70s do not instantly adapt to 68. There was grumbling. There were invitations to "feel these," meaning out-stretched hands as cold as ice.

Yes, your hands are cold, I would say. Why don't you put on a sweater, thicker slacks, maybe socks with those shoes. Pretend it's winter.

My tact wasn't particularly convincing. I'd come home and find the setting at 70 degrees, with people lolling about in short sleeves and shorts.

They were having a little Maui vacation.

With beads of sweat forming, I'd surreptitiously lower the thermostat back to 68 — or maybe 67 in compensation for the natural gas that had just been wasted.

What are the human limits of indoor cold? I think of myself as being able to handle 65 degrees without undue misery if I dress in layers and step lively about the house.

A house in the low 60s is pushing it, but if PG&E is serious about what's in store for us this winter maybe we need to think about going there.

Cheryl doesn't want to go there. Saving energy becomes meaningless if life is no longer worth living, she says.

Cheryl notes that as a small person with low body mass, she can't generate the heat of a larger person.

This is scientifically plausible, I suppose, which makes my argument for wearing wool beanies indoors all the stronger.

Cheryl prefers to outsmart PG&E and avoid hypothermia by building more fires in our wood-burning stove in the living room. In times past we've used it primarily as a mood-setting lux-

ury while watching movies.

This stove could be our salvation, she says. We should be out stockpiling wood. We need to make a great wall of logs by the front door like the Alaskans do.

I'm slow to warm to the idea. Wood fires are such a mess. Do we really want to spend all winter huddled next to a heat source?

I'd rather shake things up in other ways. Maybe take long showers, steam up the bathroom and make that my nest for a few hours each day. Go to work early and stay late, sucking up heat paid for by my employers. Attend more movies and hang out at Starbucks, with my PG&E savings paying the tab.

Isn't crisis another name for opportunity? A chance to take a sledgehammer to our ossified lifestyle and craft something new?

Give me your best shot, PG&E. I can take it.

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Nathan Burgstahler, 12, takes a flying leap off the hay-bale pyramid while playing tag with his friends. The boys biked from across town to play at the pumpkin patch. *Jorgen Gulliksen/Register photos*

Patch

From Page C1

If Stanly Lane Marketplace doesn't jog your mind, think of the giant pumpkin patch just off Highway 29 at Stanly Lane. The pumpkin patch has been bringing joy to youngsters and oldsters for 19 years. And it's open for this year's Halloween.

Wilcoxson expects to bring in 500,000 pounds of pumpkins from Half Moon Bay before Halloween arrives. And they aren't just your run-of-the-mill orange gourds.

"I have some of the most fancy pumpkins money can buy," Wilcoxson said.

Although the standard jack-o'-lanterns are numerous in the field, there is also an array of white, green and gold pumpkins to pick from. If pumpkins aren't your choice, there are other fresh vegetables brought in daily from Wilcoxson's friend Larry, who is the produce business in Fairfield.

Most of the pumpkins are gone by the end of the Halloween holiday. "Last year I only had two bins left. Whatever I have left over I give to my friend who has a pig farm. Those pigs just gobble up the pumpkins. They just love them," Wilcoxson said.

Every year Wilcoxson comes up with something new at the pumpkin patch to please his customers. In addition to the baby pigs and cows, the old farm equipment and the hay-bale pyramid, this year students who visit the patch as a classroom can have their picture taken peering through a school bus window.

"This has been a lot of work, but I just love it," Wilcoxson said, referring to the plywood school bus front. "Usually the kids take their pictures on the hay bale pyramid, so I wanted to do something new this year."

Although the pumpkin patch is Wilcoxson's first love and something that will go on as long as he has anything to say about it, Stanly Lane Marketplace is a secret waiting to be told. This year Wilcoxson planted 3,000 lavender plants and has been dis-



Chad Elliott has been unloading pumpkins for over a month just to get ready for the season. "We eat, sleep and drink pumpkins," said Elliott.

tilling the oil and hydrosol, which is used to spray on sheets or air fresheners. The 1,300-square-foot picnic area is a place to escape and enjoy a snack and cold drink. The grassy area has picnic tables and a windmill that is anchored by an old-fashioned redwood swing.

"I just got the windmill last year. I always wanted one," Wilcoxson said. There are plans to use the wooden water tank to power the windmill. Well-behaved dogs, on leashes are welcome at the picnic area. "I don't like to let dogs in the pumpkin patch, they want to pee on the pumpkins, and that's not good for business," Wilcoxson said.

Wilcoxson admits his fiancée, Peggy O'Kelly, is the reason for the 300 olive trees he planted on the on the four-and-half acres that encompasses Wilcoxson's property. O'Kelly owns the St. Helena Olive Oil Company in Rutherford.

"Yeah, I did it for her,"

Wilcoxson said with a wide grin. The olives will be hand-picked in mid-November. "We don't have a press. At least for this year we will have to take them somewhere else for that." However, you can purchase upscale St. Helena Olive Oil products in the Stanly Lane Marketplace country store.

The roomy store has an assortment to please any finicky customer. There are displays of jams and jellies, coffees, barbecue sauces, mustards, chocolates, cookies, garlic ropes, vinegars, knickknacks, soaps, dog and cat treats.

"About 75 percent of the products sold in the store are locally made," Wilcoxson said.

If all the local goodies don't tickle your fancy, there is an assortment of antique furniture from Hungary. The market has hundreds of wine barrels — half and whole. But he's gone one step further, using the wine barrel to make water fountains that bring the soothing sound of sit-

ting next to a babbling creek. Currently, Wilcoxson has a few bins with fresh fruits and vegetables. However that will soon change. He has purchased the cold produce cases from the Val-lerga's store that closed in River Park Shopping Center. Once the produce cases are installed, customers will have 36 feet of fresh produce to pick from daily.

And Wilcoxson, 48, knows his produce. His grandfather Augie Giovannoni started Giovannoni's Market in Napa. Wilcoxson worked there until he was 18 and then went into delivering fresh produce daily to the restaurants in the Napa Valley.

"For 30 years I went to the produce market six days a week. I really love the produce business. I used to own the Ice House next to the Wine Train, but I lost it to eminent domain for the flood project. When I moved here, I had the produce business for a while, but I was losing

money, so I just let it go," he said. "Well it's a long story, and I'll just leave it at that."

The move from downtown Napa to Stanly Lane Marketplace didn't mean the end of Wilcoxson's cold storage facility for grapevines. "I had to refinance to build this facility," he said. "But it's state-of-the-art."

Ninety wineries and vineyard management firms store their grapevines in one of the 120 lockers inside the huge icebox. During his peak season of January and February, Wilcoxson said, "I probably have \$10 million worth of winegrape vines in here. I'm like Mother Nature for the vines. I keep them dormant. Once they take the vines from the cold storage and put them in the ground, they start sprouting within seven to eight days," he said.

Wilcoxson's workplace will soon house his residence. He,

along with O'Kelly, and their four children between them, Billy, 16, Justine, 15, Kaelin, 13 and Emily, 10, are building a house at the back of the property which will become their family home. It's not unusual to see one of the four kids helping out around the place. Wilcoxson has owned the property for about 20 years.

"Many years ago my uncle Al (Giovannoni) drove me out here and said, 'this is your retirement.'"

Well, I'm here but I don't have any plans of retiring just yet. I hope to get a license so I can put in a deli and serve wine," he said. "You know this

place is always going to be changing. I don't have a lot of money, so I'll have to do things when I can afford it. But there really isn't anything you can't do. You just have to figure it out."

"I have some of the most fancy pumpkins money can buy."

— Billy Wilcoxson
Stanly Ranch owner

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