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## Rising gas prices pinch profits at local companies

By Fran Daniel



### Gas-saving tips

Frank Foster owns Fibrenew Piedmont, whose employees go to customers' homes and offices to do leather and plastic repairs. Foster, who has a workshop in High Point, offers these ways for businesses to save gas:

- Be overprepared. When you travel, take more supplies than you think you need to avoid making an extra trip back to your workshop or office.
- Consider providing free estimates via e-mail or online submission forms instead of traveling to do them.
- Work onsite whenever possible.

- Carefully schedule jobs based on location. Schedule several jobs in the same town in one day, and make sure your jobs are in a logical loop. Even if it's just across town, driving back and forth all day can add up.
- Confirm all appointments before you leave.
- Double-check to make sure you take the most direct route.

The owners of Sherwood Flower Shop are doing their best not to raise their delivery charges, despite rising gas prices.

"It's a tough pill to swallow," said Robert Burchette, who operates the shop on Robinhood Road with his wife, Mary. He estimated that the shop's gas expenses on two commercial vans rose 20 percent last month over January, partly because vendors have gone to fuel surcharges.

"They're adding anywhere from \$6 to \$10 on each delivery to cover their increased costs," Burchette said.

The Burchettes are among many local business owners feeling the pinch from high gas prices.

In the Triad, the average price of regular, unleaded gas was \$3.49 a gallon Thursday, the same as it was two weeks ago, but up 41 cents from a month ago, according to AAA. The price of diesel increased 33 cents to \$3.85 on Thursday from a month ago.

Oil prices climbed more than 3.5 percent Thursday. Benchmark crude added \$3.44 to settle at \$101.42 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

At Thruway Packaging Store, Eli Bradley offers moving services to pick up furniture and other items that he brings back to the store to be packaged for UPS, FedEx and ABF Freight shipment.

He said his fuel bill rose 7 to 10 percent last month over January. Although diesel prices are also high, Bradley said he is glad one of his two moving trucks uses diesel fuel.

"It doesn't burn as fast as gas," he said.

Calvin Parrish and his wife, Carol, own Cliff Harvel's Moving Co. Inc., which is based in Kernersville and has an office in Winston-Salem.

Parrish said his employees traveled about the same number of miles for residential and commercial jobs in February as they did in January, but his fuel bill was \$600 more last month.

"It's sure taking the profit away," Parrish said. "With the way the economy is and everything, we're having to eat it up because we'd rather not go up on our prices."

Some business owners said they have come up with strategies to try to avoid taking big hits from the high fuel prices.

Doug Bassinger, the franchise owner of Advantaclean of Iredell County, provides emergency water and fire restoration, air-duct cleaning and mold remediation. The company's territory goes from Iredell to Wilkes counties, including Forsyth County, which means that its employees usually travel 500 to 600 miles a week.

Bassinger said his employees call ahead to make sure a potential customer will be at home.

"I've gone 50 miles to a job and found nobody at home," he said. "Obviously, that's a wasted trip."

Bassinger said the company also offers discounts to customers who set up multiple services in one day and in

one trip.

"That saves us a trip out and also makes it a little more efficient for the homeowner and the business," he said.

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