



**AUSTIN
UTILITIES**

Connections for Better Living™



Connections

December 2021
Customer Newsletter

HeatShare Round Up Kicks Off

We're kicking off a new program called HeatShare Round Up. AU has been supporting the Salvation Army HeatShare program for over a decade, but for the first time, customers can choose to automatically round up their utility bill to the next whole dollar each month, in order to help those in need. The average contribution is just 50 cents a month, and the maximum annual contribution is less than \$12 per year. While that may not seem like a lot of money, it can go a long way for offering financial aid to those who are struggling.



Austin Utilities Board of Commissioners

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*Austin Utilities Office
will be closed
Friday, Dec. 24th
for Christmas
&
Friday, Dec. 31st
for New Year's*

What is HeatShare?

HeatShare is a Salvation Army Program that provides emergency utility assistance for people with no place left to turn. The program is funded by customers of local utility companies. Funds are typically used to pay for heating assistance with a maximum grant of \$400. In the last decade donations made by our customers have grown from a few hundred dollars to over \$3,000 a year.

How can I help?



Scan the QR Code to sign up.

During the month of December, we encourage our customers to support the Salvation Army HeatShare program with a financial donation. Make a donation in our office and hang a stocking in your name on the HeatShare Hearth located in our lobby. Sign up for a monthly

HeatShare Round Up donation and receive your choice of a free gift, jar opener, biodegradable sponge, or letter opener.



HeatShare helps people with no place left to turn

(A story told by a HeatShare case worker)

Many years ago we provided help and guidance to a family who has an adult child with disabilities living in the home. We had not heard from this family for many years as they have been managing on their own. A recent death in the family caused a financial burden and they fell behind on their bills enough that they were not able to figure a way out without assistance. Thanks to the availability of HeatShare funds donated by AU customers, we were able to provide help and get them back to managing finances on their own.

Natural Gas Update

Austin Utilities is anticipating higher gas prices this winter and is encouraging customers to practice conservation. Costs could be 30% to 35% higher and are related to the cost of purchasing natural gas. There are several factors contributing to the higher commodity prices. As coal fired power plants are shut down to minimize carbon emissions they are being replaced with natural gas fueled facilities. In addition, natural gas storage going into the winter is low, and more natural gas is being liquefied and shipped to other countries who are willing to pay a higher price for it. These factors create a higher demand for natural gas as we are entering the Minnesota heating season.



Austin Utilities is adjusting their gas purchasing strategy to combat the forecasted increases. Historically, AU purchases first of month index volumes to achieve a total of 75% natural gas purchased going into the month at a fixed cost. Staff will review this strategy on a month-to-month basis over the winter season increasing the purchase to result in a total hedged volume in a range of 80-90%. This will leave less volumes exposed to the volatile swings in the daily winter gas market, while making sure AU does not over-purchase.

Customers can practice low-cost conservation methods to help ease the burden of higher heating costs. Setting back your thermostat as low as comfortable overnight and when you are not home, wearing warmer clothes around the house, making sure your furnace filter is clean, and closing shades or drapes after the sun goes down to reduce heat loss through your windows are all easy methods to save energy. Customers can also get an energy audit using AU's House Call home energy audit program for a more in depth look at ways to save.

Drive Thru Trick or Treat and Salvation Army Food Drive

Our annual Drive-Thru Halloween Food Drive held October 28th was a success as we handed out over 325 goodie bags to local kids who came out to see our mascot, Meter Buddy. We collected about 200 food items for the Salvation Army Food Shelf. A big thank you to our customers.



Meter Buddy greeting Trick or Treaters.



AU staff left to right: Wendy Whalen, Meter Buddy, Jay Kohnke & Craig Weis.

Left to Right: Lori Espe & Major Strickler from the Salvation Army. AU staff Jay Kohnke, Bill Bumgarner & Dan Ulland.



What's the Cost of Lighting Up the Holidays

Outdoor Inflatables

Becoming more popular every year, they run about 200 watts for 24-hours a day during the month of December costing you just under \$19.00 (each!)

Indoor Pre-lit Trees

A 7.5 foot tall tree with 650 incandescent mini-bulbs uses about 300 watts. On an average of 12-hours a day during the month of December it will end up costing you just under \$14.00

Outdoor String Lights

On average, a modest display of 10 strands of incandescent bulbs would use about 151 kWh and cost \$19.31 for the full season. (Using LED lights will reduce that to 18 kWh of energy costing \$2.27!)

Purchase LED Holiday Lighting and get rebates up to \$12 per string

Recycle your old lighting at AU - bins in lobby

Employee Spotlight

Wendy Whalen

Customer Account Representative

Wendy joined Austin Utilities in 2007 as a Customer Service Representative. She came with a background as Customer Service Manager at Younkers. After six years at AU Wendy was promoted to Customer Account Representative. Her main tasks include handling billing accuracy, moving and service orders and metering changes and readings. She says she loves finding solutions to problems and helping AU's field staff connect with customers.

Wendy lives in Austin, grew up in Lyle and has spent all of her life in this area. She is close with her parents and brother and has a fur baby named Nash(ville), who is a very spoiled puppy. Wendy is a big Country Music fan and even won a trip to the Country Music Awards. Since that first trip she has gone to the awards three more times. Wendy also enjoys camping with family and friends. She hopes to expand on her love of travelling by hitting some of the places on her bucket list like the East Coast, Switzerland, Ireland, and an Alaskan Cruise.



Give the Gift that Never Gets Returned.

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Gifting a utility payment is a great way to support a friend or family member who may be struggling right now.

Give the gift that will never be returned and will always be used and appreciated. When you make a gift payment on an account you receive a Gift Payment Certificate to give to the recipient showing the amount of the payment.

Gift payment certificates are available in any denomination and can be purchased at the Austin Utilities office at 1908 14th St NE or by calling 507-433-8886



Red Cross Blood Drive

Thursday, Dec. 30th
Austin Utilities
1908 14th St NE
9:00 am - 3:00 pm



redcrossblood.org
1-800-REDCROSS

The Austin Utilities Board of Commissioners

Monthly Meeting was held on Oct. 19th 2021. Agenda items included:

- 3rd Quarter Charge-offs
- Resolution to adopt HeatShare Round up program.
- AU purchasing plans for potential Natural Gas price fluctuations.

Meeting minutes are available at www.austinutilities.com



LED Light Bulbs

ON SALE NOW



Reduced pricing through December while supplies last at this participating local retailer:

Walmart



Help families in need this Holiday Season by purchasing gifts from a local child's wish list and donating them to the Salvation Army. AU will have an Angel Tree in our lobby through December 8th.



*Happy Holidays from everyone
at Austin Utilities.*

*We wish you a safe and happy celebration as we work to
make your holiday season warm and bright.*

