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## Companies team to provide heating oil

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**James Gerdson,**  
**president of Apollo**  
**Heating, and Ron**  
**Lykins, VP of Lykins**  
**Oil Co.**

(Gary Landers photo)

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In Cincinnati, synergy can still be spelled with an “S.” And it occurs when two organizations combine to enhance their productivity.

A case in point: the recent alliance between Apollo Heating and Air and Lykins Oil Co.

For 53 years, Lykins has been providing heating oil and storage tanks to residents of Greater Cincinnati. In an effort to meet all the needs of its customers, the company expanded to provide furnace repair and replacement. But the effort wasn't a good fit for the Milford company.

“Because we cover such a large geographic area, we couldn't build staff fast enough to deliver oil and provide (heating and cooling) service,” said vice president Ron Lykins.

So the company decided to find a partner.

“Our criteria included a company that had expertise in all types of oil-fired systems, as well as a proven track record of providing reliable 24-hour service. Apollo stood out above all of the other companies that we considered,” Mr. Lykins said. “They have the best programs and best technicians.”

The agreement will allow each company to do what it does best. Lykins will continue to supply heating oil and storage tanks, while Apollo can provide maintenance or replacement of equipment such as oil furnaces and boilers. It will also permit Mr. Lykins and his staff new opportunities to market home heating oil to the Cincinnati market. “We feel that oil is the very best way to heat a home,” he said. “It's the safest, because it doesn't explode. And it's the hottest: Oil has twice the BTU content of any known product. People say it's dirty, but with today's high-efficiency oil equipment, it burns clean.

“We've taken a beating over the last decade because heating oil suppliers have not done a very good job of marketing our product. We got outsold by natural gas and propane.”

Because Apollo staff understand the advantages of heating oil and can service the equipment, they can help Lykins promote the product, Mr. Lykins explained.

"They're a service company. They can go into a home and help solve problems," he said. "On the other hand, handling storage tanks has always been a problem for Apollo. We can do that for them. We're sharing customer lists and doing cross-marketing."

"We're sticking to our knitting," agreed Apollo president James Gerdson. "Our goal is to increase our service business. If we provide good service, we have a better than average chance of getting (that customer's) furnace replacement business."

Apollo maintains a mailing list of about 18,000 customers. Lykins hopes to increase those property owners' awareness of heating oil options through Apollo's advertising and other communications tools. Apollo hopes to capture a portion of Lykins' 14,000 customers to continue the company's 10-15 percent annual growth rate. To do so, it is enhancing its capabilities.

One major upgrade is Apollo's recent purchase of a global positioning system. Each technician is represented on a screen by a symbol that indicates his expertise. Technicians trained to work on oil burning equipment are shown in a different color from those who are not. A dispatcher can not only track the location and travel direction of each service unit, but can deploy the technician nearest and best able to handle a service call.

"You always get a real person answering the phone when you call here," said Mr. Gerdson. "We're always training and looking at things from a service point of view."

The company prides itself on working in older homes - in fact, its technicians do not install systems in new construction. A wall of color photos in Apollo's Bond Hill office is the company's portfolio, showing vintage houses in which it's installed new heating and air-conditioning systems. But unlike many heating and cooling companies that assume aging oil systems need to be replaced with natural gas, Apollo employees can help property owners consider the benefits of replacing the old furnace with high-efficiency oil equipment.

Said Mr. Gerdson: "A lot of companies just don't do oil anymore. These young guys don't learn it. We think working on oil furnaces is fun. It's real technical."

Several hospitals are installing oil-fired systems because oil burns hotter, is readily available and now is comparatively less expensive than other heat options, Mr. Lykins said.

"The (Hamilton County) courthouse and justice center are converting to oil heat because they wanted to heat with one set of boilers," he added. "The Statue of Liberty is also heated with oil."