

Reflections of Richard L. O'Shields

A person's life and career are marked by significant milestones and LSU, with its fine engineering college, was tremendously significant to me. My introduction to LSU began in the Spring of 1949 at the University of Oklahoma (OU) where I as an undergraduate senior in mechanical engineering and working as a teaching assistant. Professor Eugene Dawson, head of Mechanical Engineering at OU, asked me one day if I was still interested in petroleum engineering. I replied emphatically that I was and he told me of an opening at LSU.

Soon, I contacted Bennie Craft, chairman of LSU's Department of Petroleum Engineering, who, in due time, offered me an instructor's position while I worked on a master's degree. After my acceptance, I told Bennie that I surely could use a summer job prior to the 1949-50 school year, since my wife and I had a baby and needed summer income to pay moving costs to Baton Rouge. Bennie soon called back and asked if I'd like to be a roughneck on an offshore oil rig that summer. I jumped at the opportunity and

reported to the Humble Oil and Refining Company's division office in New Orleans, where I was interviewed by H. Mark Krause, an LSU petroleum engineering graduate. This began a fine relationship with him that would last through the years.

Bennie directed my LSU teaching assignments. I instructed lab courses related to natural gas control, measurement and composition analysis. He was a fine leader and teacher. Shortly after my arrival to LSU, he introduced me to Murray F. "Buddy" Hawkins, Jr., a petroleum engineering professor, who became my advisor for graduate school. Buddy would later become chairman of the Department of Petroleum Engineering. He had a rare combination of intellect, integrity, initiative, and a genuine love and caring for his family and friends. His influence had a most beneficial impact on my life and career. Buddy's accomplishments were many and he was inducted into the Engineering Hall of Distinction during 1985, a most deserved honor.

My teaching experiences were interesting because of the high caliber of LSU's engineering school students. Their dedication made them fine students and an inspiration to their classmates and teachers.

Working and studying under both Bennie and Buddy during those postwar years were the outstanding experience of my time at LSU. Both men had the rare ability to combine sound academics with practical experience. I recall the daily discussions with those gentlemen over coffee. Topics ranged from academics to politics to football. Those discussions were a very real part of my education. A close friendship developed not only between us, but also among our wives.

Bennie had a unique ability of matching a student's ability with various companies in the industry. He was convinced that when I graduated I should take an opening with The Pure Oil Company. I had leanings toward the companies that had provided me with summer employment during my college years. But, Bennie's advice was to join Pure Oil. Because of my respect for Bennie's judgment, I followed his advice and soon found myself working on pressure maintenance projects in several West Texas fields for this company during the early 1950's. In 1953, I moved to a large independent operator. During this period, I also visited all the active producing provinces of the U.S. and South and Central America.

Whenever I traveled, I not only took the technical training and practical skills that I'd learned at LSU, but also other valuable lessons I'd learned from Bennie and Buddy. One lesson was that a person's education doesn't stop when the school years finally end. There is something to be learned from every individual you encounter. Each person has unique

abilities. By observing and listening, a person can continue to learn and broaden his, or her, horizon.

Another lesson is the unpredictability of life. Little did I know when I joined Andarko Production Company in 1960, which was a new exploration subsidiary of Panhandle Eastern, that, in time, I would be called on to serve 18 of my 30 years with this preeminent natural gas company as either president or chairman.

Finally, my years in the industry have shown me that an engineer must not only develop sound technical skills, but also must understand the machinery of our government. The role of government has grown tremendously and has great impact on our profession. Young engineers must become active within industry associations and societies that can help educate government officials. Engineers beginning their careers must become aware of potential government policies that affect their particular industry and their company.

Other reflections on my LSU experiences are personal ones that include the beauty of the campus with its oak trees, azaleas, and unique architecture. My wife and I spent two wonderful years at LSU as residents in the "New Faculty Apartments." We quickly fell in love with the sound of Louisiana rain on the roofs. That also was part of our unique experience at LSU which we cherish and often reflect on with fondness.