Harris' 35-year engineering career spans globe

BY DEBRA BAKER BECK

When distinguished alumnus Loy Harris (BS '57) received his first international engineering assignment in 1964—for Esso Standard Libya Inc.—he wasn’t initially sure he wanted to accept the challenge. But ultimately, Harris knew it was an offer he could not refuse.

"I decided that if I didn’t go, I would always wish that I had," the Basin (Wyo.) High School graduate says. Harris' eight-year stint in Libya (1964-1972) was the first of many involving international assignments over his 35-year career with Exxon Corporation and its affiliates worldwide. Other jobs took him to Saudi Arabia, the Yemen Arab Republic, Venezuela, and Colombia, with domestic assignments interspersed between.

Travel was only one of many aspects of his career that made it personally fulfilling.

"I enjoyed the whole thing," Harris says. "I enjoyed my time overseas; I enjoyed the scope and challenge of the operations and also just the chance to be in different cultures and be exposed to new things."

Harris' petroleum engineering career actually began seven years before accepting the Libya job. When he graduated from UW in 1957 (general engineering, with a petroleum option), he had two promising offers—one from the Carter Oil Company and one from Atlantic Refining Co. Harris accepted the Carter position, because he wanted to stay in the Rocky Mountain region.

"Carter sent him to Illinois. But within six months, Harris got his wish when Carter reassigned him to Durango, Colo. He also worked at Anchorage, Okla., before accepting the Libya assignment. Harris loved that first overseas job. "It was a delightful place to be," he says. "We had Mediterranean beaches and Roman ruins up and down the coast. Before the revolution in Libya, we even had a fairly cosmopolitan night life."

Having a small community of expatriate engineers and their families allowed Harris and the others a chance to make strong personal and professional ties that enhanced their experiences in that country. Wherever Harris' career took him and his family, he developed similarly positive relationships with both his colleagues and the country's citizens that added to the fun and excitement of each assignment.

Over the years, his duties were varied and increasingly complex. In Libya, Harris served in a series of technical and management positions, starting as a senior petroleum engineer and working up to manager of corporate planning.

Spending 35 years with one company wasn’t so unusual, according to Harris, particularly when he worked for an outstanding organization that continually challenged him.

"I got a company that was proud and pleased to be with, and I kept being moved around and exposed to different things," he says. "I enjoyed it very much and stayed there my whole working career."

Working in the energy industry for so many years left Harris with insight into the challenges it faces in the years to come. Eventually, he says, the country must deal with the diminishing cushion between the supply of energy resources and demand for them. Environmental pressures also will require more serious consideration of alternative fuel sources.

"One of these days, we’re going to have a combination of price pressures, and perhaps ecological pressures, that are going to reopen the alternate energy issue for us," Harris says. "There’s no question that increasing concern with emissions, atmospheric conditions, pollution and things like that will continue to exercise the best brains in the energy business."

"It won’t be an easy process, particularly when the transition must be made from traditional means of energy delivery to newer sources. But Harris says, people are beginning to acknowledge the need for change."

I think people are becoming more and more aware that there are finite limitations to what Spacehip Earth can provide, support and sustain," he says. "I think that it will be easier to come to grips with the issue of sensible, sustainable rates and patterns of energy consumption as part of an overall concern for the environment in which we all have to live than it was when we thought conservation was an isolated issue having to do only with energy supply, without an overall ecological awareness."

By the time he was released a month or so later, it seemed that it was a call to which I needed to respond," he says. Harris retired and eventually enrolled in Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C.

"The Divinity School is even better than I expected," he reports. "Even the 'bad' days have been good."

On June 1, Harris passed another milestone on his journey; he was ordained a deacon in the Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Miscellany

As a student, Harris participated in Sigma Nu fraternity, the UW band, intramural sports, Sigma Tau engineering honorary and ROTC.

Over the years, Harris has continued to support the University of Wyoming. He is a longtime donor to UW programs, and he is a life member of the UW Alumni Association.

Harris maintains his ties to Wyoming through his parents, Loy and Ethel, who still live in WyoFtad. Both of his siblings are UW alumni. Harris’ sister, Sally McClellan, lives in Medford, N.J. His brother, David, lives in Hilton Head, S.C.

Harris and his first wife, Karen, reared two children: Kelly Fanelli of North Palm Beach, Fla., and Loy Harris of Dallas.

Our UW distinguished alumnus and his wife, Colleen, live in Houston.