

Distinguished Alumni:

F. E. "Tut" Ellis



F. E. "Tut" Ellis talks often about the role of luck in his life, but one has to be pretty skeptical about that notion. To retire at age 55, as an executive vice president of international exploration and production operations for Conoco, requires a good deal more than luck.

Ellis was born in Cheyenne in 1933 and given the name "Floyd." His grandmother would have no part of it. "She thought it was the stupidest name in the world," Ellis says, and she gave him another name that stuck. "I don't know where she came up with Tut. I thought when I got out of high school it would leave me, but it's followed me. I have family that doesn't know what my first name is."

When he was very small, times were hard for the family. His father lost his job, like many during the Depression; his last payment was a case of beans. "We got in his Model A and went north," Ellis recalls. For two years, it was odd jobs and moving, before his father found steady work again as a butcher and the family settled in Thermopolis.

Going through school, Ellis always knew he'd attend university. "My folks made it clear they didn't want me running around doing odd jobs," he says. When he graduated as the "top boy" of his class and got a four-year scholarship to UW, that's where he headed. "Everything started there," he says.

He liked to play basketball, and planned to become a coach. "But when I got to UW, I found out I wasn't that good a basketball player, and I wasn't that tall." Because he had worked two summers in the oil fields

around Thermopolis, he decided to try petroleum engineering, as it seemed to offer the best chance of employment in Wyoming. After graduation, he received three job offers and chose Conoco's because they were the biggest operator in Wyoming. "That was 22 moves ago," Ellis says, laughing.

He went back to Thermopolis as an engineer trainee, then transferred to Linch, then back to Thermopolis, then Cody, then Denver. "That's where I started getting outside of engineering, into property acquisition, and got a taste of upper management and financials," he says. He went into his first supervisory position - back in Wyoming - after that.

In a place called Sussex Field, Ellis worked on some pioneering engineering projects aimed at increasing oil production. One involved using water in oil recovery. "You only get less than 15 percent of the oil out of a reserve with the natural pressure in the earth," Ellis explains. "But if you drill wells and pump water down into them, you can add energy that way. The water acts like a piston to push the oil out. It increased recovery up 20 or even 30 percent. That was the start of water floods in the industry, so I was involved in a lot of the initial water floods at that time."

But water doesn't always do the job, and Ellis oversaw the engineering of an alternative new method. "If you've got really heavy oil, you may only be able to get 5 percent of that," he says. "Then we don't pump water, we pump air with big compressors. We ignite the oil underground and keep it going with the air. It creates heat, which reduces the viscosity of the oil, and gas builds and produces pressure. This was one of the first ones in the U.S." He was also involved in the first carbon dioxide projects, which mixed carbon dioxide with oil to reduce its viscosity.

Before long, he got the attention of Conoco's top management in Houston and had to leave the Rocky Mountain area. "Up until then, I'd said I would never go to Houston; I'd quit first. But they kept sending my check, and I had to keep following it," he says. "This was my big opportunity." He went to Houston as the assistant to the group vice president. "I got to meet everybody," he says. "That's part of success - getting known - that and luck."

Soon he was negotiating with the Mexican government and bidding for offshore tracks. He used his engineer-

ing and statistics background to develop a scheme for making those bids by determining the probability of success and the possible size of the reservoir, which was widely used. "I was very lucky; the kinds of projects I worked on were high visibility," he says.

When Ellis was promoted to district manager in Odessa, Texas, he shouldered the responsibility for 200 employees and 80,000 barrels of oil a day, an eye-opening experience. "It was the first time I found out that not everybody was as ethical as I was," he says. "I uncovered hourly employees pilfering Conoco equipment. It had been going on forever." Once those involved were dismissed, "I tried to establish a code of ethics. I think I gained some recognition for that," he says.

He returned to Houston as the chief petroleum engineer for the U.S. before being sent to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to earn a master's degree in management. Back in Texas, Ellis made his way up to vice president for international production and then executive vice president for international exploration and production for Conoco. He also became a group vice president with the parent company, DuPont. Traveling often, nationally and internationally, in one year he logged 300,000 miles on an airplane; he met with Arab sheiks, West African presidents and British prime ministers. It was exciting, but tiring.

He'd planned to retire at 55, and he did so. "Luck played a big part in my getting to that goal," he says. Now he does more leisurely traveling with his wife, golfs and works on his oil-themed stamp collection. He's completely out of the oil business, though he is still on the advisory committee of UW's engineering school.

These days, Ellis spends half the year in a house he designed and built in Thermopolis, the other half in his house north of Houston, where he and his wife, Diane (also a UW alum) can visit their three children and four grandchildren. Ellis lost an 11-year-old granddaughter to liver cancer last year; he and Diane spent the three years she was sick trying to help her and assisting the family. The Ellis Family Foundation, a trust the couple runs together with their children, has set up a memorial scholarship in honor of their granddaughter.

The Foundation also funds seven engineering scholarships at UW and the Alumni Association Scholarship,

so Ellis shares all of his good luck with others at the place where he says "everything started."

Robert O. Gose



Bob Gose grew up in family ranching and drilling operations in and near the Black Hills of northeastern Wyoming. He has continued his ranching operations there throughout a high-technology professional career of more than 55 years that included more than 10 years as a military pilot and weapon systems development officer.

Gose graduated from Upton High School with a four-year scholarship to the University of Wyoming. He was influenced to enroll in engineering by his love of hands-on ranching operations and machinery, and by his family, including an uncle with an engineering degree from UW who was also his science teacher at Upton.

Soon after Pearl Harbor, on July 4th, 1942, during his second year at UW, Gose was sworn into the United States Army Air Force at Ft. Francis E. Warren to enter pilot training. He received his pilot wings and commission at Ellington Field Texas and completed pilot instructor school at Randolph Field Texas. He flew as a WW II combat pilot in the European Theater before returning to complete his engineering degree with honors.

"I always felt at home at UW," Gose says. "I was fully supported by the UW faculty. The faculty cared about my development as an individual." Gose continues to be close to UW, serving on the University Foundation Board and the National Advisory Board for the Engineering College. He is national chairman of

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