Thomas M. Botts UW Distinguished Alumni

By Julianne Couche
Alumni News Editor

Fast Facts
Education: BA ’77, Civil Engineering
Occupation: Executive VP of Global Manufacturing & Production, Royal Dutch Shell (retired)
Selected Accomplishments: Led a team of 50,000 employees and contractors, operating at sites around the world; board member of three of Shell’s largest employee networks for women, Hispanic and African American members, member of American Petroleum Industry and National Manufacturing Association; board member of EnPro Industries, John Wood Group plc, and on the Council of Overseers for the James Graduate School of Business at Rice University.

When Tom Botts was growing up on his family’s ranch outside of Riverton, Wyo., as the only son in the family he might have been expected to continue the ranching life. Instead, his father encouraged him to go to college and then do something else. “My dad loved the life but he didn’t think I would,” Botts recalled.

“As it turns out, he was right.”

“Ranching was a great way to grow up but I wouldn’t have been happy doing it for a lifetime. It was a no-brainer for me to go to UW for an engineering degree,” Botts recalls.

Botts recalls his early days on campus, living on the 4th floor of McIntyre Hall before moving into an apartment off campus. He was involved in Mortar Board, Tau Beta Pi, and the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Before he knew it, he was a senior and he was interviewing on campus with Shell Oil. Upon graduation, he was hired as a civil engineer. Two weeks later, he married his “childhood sweetheart.” Right after that, he and his wife, Shelley, moved to Ventura, Calif., where he started his 36-year career with that company.

“California was great,” he recalled. "I could see Ventura Beach from my office.

"He spent some time playing volleyball on the beach, enjoying the steady 72 degree temperatures and never needing to turn on heat or air conditioning. “It was quite a departure for a kid from Wyoming.”

It wasn’t all fun and games, of course. The company was shifting Botts’ focus toward petroleum engineering.

After two years, he became certified and licensed in that field.

During this time, he took on an array of upstream assignments in both engineering and operations across the US. By 1990 he was Division Operations Manager, responsible for onshore upstream operations in the western half of the US; later he assumed responsibility for both engineering and operations as Division Production manager.

In 1995 he was appointed Treasurer of Shell Oil Company. Three years later he moved to London, holding positions as U.K. Gas Director, U.K. Oil Director, and U.K. Managing Director. In 2003 he moved to the Netherlands and became Executive VP for Exploration and Production, Europe. He was named Executive VP of Global Manufacturing Royal Dutch Shell in 2009. He retired in 2012.

“I thought it would last a couple years, but the good thing about a global company is that you can quit and do something else but it is all within the company,” Botts said. His first 20 years were spent in either California or Texas. Normally once someone begins their career in the States, Botts explained, that is where they stay. Botts and his wife had young children and thought it might be a good experience for their family if they could go overseas. So he was able to obtain the position in London, then in Scotland, then the Netherlands. “We were sure what it would be like, but we decided to give it a go. Thirty-six years later, it’s a career.”

In the meantime, his parents had passed away, and the family ranch had been taken over by others. But, the young Botts family had purchased property near Moran, Wyo., with views of Jackson Hole and the Tetons.

“We wanted to give the kids a sense of home, so we brazened them, telling them wherever we lived that Wyoming was their home. Now they return as often as they can, so our tactic worked.”

During the time Botts was Executive VP for Exploration and Production, Europe, three of the company’s five regions were headed by people from Wyoming.

“Tom Botts is a leader in understanding how to move an organization from a current state to a future successful state. He exemplifies how a Wyoming attitude goes a long way toward creating a successful business. He is a winner and does it with integrity.”

Now that Botts is retired from Shell Oil, he is living full time in Wyoming and has turned his attention to today’s UW engineering program. In 2012 he was appointed a group driving the integration of the School of Energy Resources and the Engineering school.

He is part of a group playing what the governor has chosen to go about it is exciting.”

Part of the concept is to gather a group of industry leaders who went to UW, such as Botts, and explore what it takes to create a top tier engineering school. Top tier usually refer to being in the top quarter of rankings issued by national magazines or other rating institutions. Botts explained that part of the approach is to consider what industry leaders look for when they go to universities to hire. “When you start peeling the onion on the question, you look at what kinds of students you attract, what kinds of faculty, the programs you execute, the research that you do; these all dial into what it is to be Tier 1.”

Botts said when he learned he’d been named a UW Distinguished Alumni, he thought, “Holy mackerel do you have the right guy?” But he said he was very honored and pleasantly surprised.

“Especially later in my career and since I’ve retired I’ve wanted to give back to the university. I attribute a large part of the success I had to the experience I had at UW.”

For more information on Thomas M. Botts, visit uwalumni.org/2013 September/October/2013