

PERSPECTIVES

From roughneck to 'the best drilling engineer,' Grey Wolf's Robert Urbanowski finds rewarding work in drilling business

By Linda Hsieh, Associate Editor

WHEN ROBERT URBANOWSKI began college at Texas A&M in 1979, the oil industry was moving full-speed ahead and petroleum engineering was the "it" degree.

"Unfortunately," Mr Urbanowski explained, "when I got out of school in 1983, things had turned around 180 degrees and there were no jobs to speak of."

Rather than going to work for a major oil company as he had envisioned, he began working as a roughneck on Grey Wolf rigs.

"It was a lot of physical labor out in the heat and rain, which wasn't what I had planned on," he said. "But it gave me an opportunity to learn things hands-on and really focus on the drilling side of the business. So it worked out well."

Really well, it seems. Mr Urbanowski has been at Grey Wolf in the 23 years since, going from roughneck to his current position as manager of engineering, where he oversees engineering for all surface equipment for Grey Wolf rigs. Recently he has worked to review the company's mud tank standardization, refine its newbuild cost analysis process and implement new technologies that continue to improve health, safety and environmental records.

Ed Jacob, Grey Wolf senior vice president of domestic operations, said he's learned a lot from Mr Urbanowski in the 7 years they've worked together.

"I've always described Robert as the best drilling engineer I've ever worked with in my career, and I've been in this business for 35 years," Mr Jacob said. "He's absolutely the best."

DOING REWARDING WORK

Mr Urbanowski currently serves on the IADC Board of Directors, and he's active on both the Underbalanced Operations & Managed Pressure Drilling and Maintenance committees. This is also his 4th year on the annual IADC/SPE Drilling Conference program committee. "It's rewarding to see good technical papers get written," he said.

Mr Urbanowski has also been working with the API to help write equipment standards for



"In this business, it's hard to be an expert in all areas – mechanical, electrical and petroleum. So you try to learn as much as you can," said Robert Urbanowski, manager of engineering for Grey Wolf.

drilling and hoisting equipment as a member of Subcommittee 8.

"There are a lot of people involved in this effort," said Subcommittee 8 chairman **Mark Sibille of Frank's Casing Crew & Rental Tools**. "But I think Robert's the most objective person there, as well as one of our most active and diligent members. He makes life a lot easier for the chairman."

Mr Urbanowski noted that early in his career, he learned a lot from **Jim Nelson**, former president and CEO of Grey Wolf.

"When you presented anything to Mr Nelson, he always asked a lot of questions about things you hadn't thought about before. So you would go back and think about those things, then bring him new answers," he said. "Well, the next time you present something to him, you learned to look a little harder at what you've done and to investigate things in greater detail."

Apparently Mr Nelson's lesson has been well-learned: "Robert is very detailed and makes very few mistakes," Mr Jacob said. "It's very difficult to catch a Robert Urbanowski error." ♠

Robert Urbanowski on deep drilling

Q: Is the industry making a bigger push for deeper drilling?

A: It's hard to say whether there's more of it going on. It's just how you analyze the statistics. But I do think we'll be seeing more deeper drilling on land.

Of course, it only makes sense that we would drill the shallower oil and gas first. But as we use up more oil and gas, the economics will change and the demand will change. Deeper wells will become more attractive. Many of the reservoirs that operators have bypassed in the past, a lot of independents are looking at now.

But deeper drilling is a continuous challenge for our industry, especially from the perspective of equipment designs. ♠