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YEARS OF MAKING DEALS HAPPEN

LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD: A 30-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE FOR WOMEN IN ENERGY

By Rebecca Ponton

THE YEAR IS 1993: RUTH BADER GINSBURG BECOMES THE SECOND WOMAN TO BE APPOINTED TO THE U.S. SUPREME COURT. The Family and Medical Leave Act becomes law, entitling employees to take up to 12 weeks off work after giving birth. Janet Reno is sworn in as the first female attorney general of the United States. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women is adopted by the U.N. General Assembly. American astronaut Ellen Ochoa becomes the first Hispanic woman to travel into space. Hazel O’Leary becomes the first woman and first African American to be appointed secretary of energy. And NAPE holds its first expo!

The energy industry is a very different place now than it was 30 years ago, especially in terms of opportunities for women. However, it would not be until 2016 that Vicki Hollub became the first woman CEO of a major U.S. oil and gas company when she was appointed to head Occidental Petroleum. We talked to three women who witnessed decades of change, asking about the progress they experienced firsthand and what they would still like to see as the industry is in the midst of transition.

LORI DAVIS | RIG-CHEM

Lori Davis is president and CEO of Rig-Chem, a specialty chemical manufacturer and supplier based in Houma, Louisiana, that has serviced the oil and gas industry since 1980. Rig-Chem’s team of experienced professionals works with operators to provide safe, competitive solutions for the energy industry. Davis has actively served and supported many organizations — SPE, AADE,

SCIA, WBENC and WBEC South — and continues to instill the importance of commitment to these groups to her team. Business is the vehicle; however, family — her son and daughter-in-law work in the company — amazing employees and a supportive husband at her side are what fuel Davis’ soul.

Davis recalled:

In the early days, I made field crew changes to increase company visibility and build relationships. I got up at 3 a.m. to meet these guys who were going offshore for their 7-14 day hitch and greeting those coming in to ensure they didn’t forget about us in this competitive market where Fortune 500 companies are king. There were no other women around at that hour except maybe at the coffee shop. Now there are women working in every corner of the industry.

Later, as I conducted corporate city sales, I had to carry a pager. I knew all the stops along the way, so I could call my clients, and I would have sleeves of quarters, something that may soon be only a memory. I remember my first cell phone — a bag phone that was as big as my body — and I thought I was in high cotton. I remember my father wanted to make sure I was safe while traveling, and I was so excited to be able to skip the parking lot pay phones and remain in my car to set up my client meetings.

Technology has been one of the biggest changes. It’s helped business, but it has its own challenges. During COVID-19, we all learned how

to do Zoom conferences. I'm here in Louisiana and we could be talking to someone in Saudi Arabia. We learned how to work globally and how to work outside our comfort zone successfully.

My sister and I purchased the company from our parents in 2002, and it's been an interesting journey in a field few women pursued back then. Now, it's a different story with women welcomed and embraced, which lends promise for young women with dreams of working in a male-dominated field. Family, dedicated employees and strong business relationships are what has supported the longevity of Rig-Chem; it would not have been successful otherwise. We work hard to compete and provide a safe quality product and service in a highly technical environment.

Things have changed, but some things have stayed constant. Relationships are what matters most, and this will never change. The oil and gas industry has some of the biggest hearted, most giving people you will ever meet. And I am proud to say that I am blessed for what has been

provided to me. Yes, there have been challenges and many times I was ready to walk away, but I think back to my crew change days and appreciate how far we've come, and I wouldn't change that for anything.

LORI FREMIN | HALTERMANN CARLESS

After more than 29 years at Shell, which culminated in her role as general manager of disruptive thinking, digitalization and innovative programs, Lori Fremin joined Haltermann Carless in early 2022 as president and general manager of HC Manvel Inc, HCS.

Fremin shared:

I could author a book on the technical, operational and commercial changes that I have experienced over the last 30-plus years since I joined the industry in 1992. I had an incredible opportunity to learn, grow and deliver value with an exceptional company.

There have been some notable changes: One, going from being the only woman to a room full of women. Early in my career, I was often the



Lori Fremin worked for over 20 years in deepwater. Here, she is shown walking down from the rig to the production deck. At the time, she was general manager of surface engineering, and her organization included all of the engineers, technical services and contractors across all eight assets (nine structures) of the Shell Deepwater assets in the Gulf of Mexico, outside of the drilling and completions organization. (Offshore at the Perdido Spar in the Gulf of Mexico, 2018.) | Photographic Services, Shell International Limited

only woman in the meeting, in the units, in the field, offshore, in the mechanic shops or in the construction yards. This changed significantly over my tenure. Two, more learners, less knowers. In a world where data and information are everywhere, the value of learning becomes more valuable than the value of knowing. Being able to learn — and learn quickly — enables change. Three, sustainable and systems thinking. I have seen our industry go from the relentless focus of delivery of value 30 years ago to sustainable and systematic delivery of value today.

However, there is still the need to raise energy

awareness. If I were queen for the day, I would wish that everyone realized just how the energy system around them is integrated into their daily lives. Just wave a magic wand and — poof! — instant energy awareness for all ages.

After 30 years, I am not so naive to believe that this will happen, which is why I volunteer my time and extra efforts into programs and nonprofits that help raise energy awareness and promote energy-based STEM education to help our current generation and beyond create our energy future. One nonprofit that I chaired until the end of 2022 is the Oilfield Energy Center, which was in the process of transforming into the Energy Education Foundation. I am now chairman emeritus.

I have watched the oil and gas industry grow and significantly improve for three decades. The barrels from the U.S. Gulf of Mexico are among the lowest greenhouse gas intensity in the world. This is a comparison among other members of the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers. Sharing this information and raising awareness is important to balance the shift of people who are attracted to the shiny new renewables businesses. We really need to incentivize top talent to join and remain in the oil and gas industry, as the hardest barrels are the ones we have not yet found or recovered.

I believe in the power of “and.” We need renewables and we need oil and natural gas to thrive in our future. We need to be smarter consumers. We need to incentivize our future generations to step into the energy industry. We need to keep our top oil and gas talent motivated. And we need to improve the energies that we have today. The world will need more energy over the next three-plus decades, and the more people who realize this, the better. Rephrasing IEA’s *World Energy Outlook 2022*, the world will need 47% more energy, and by 2050, more than half of this needs to come from the oil and natural gas industry. Since the cleanest, cheapest energy is more often than not the energy closest to the consumer, why would we not want to support our energy industry?

LUCINDA JACKSON | LUCINDA JACKSON VENTURES

Lucinda Jackson, a Ph.D. scientist and former global corporate executive, spent almost 50 years in academia and Fortune 500 companies, including Chevron, Dow and

U.S. COST OF LIVING IN 1993

YEARLY INFLATION RATE:
2.96%

YEAR-END CLOSE DOW JONES
INDUSTRIAL AVERAGE:
3,654

INTEREST RATES YEAR-END
FEDERAL RESERVE:
6%

AVERAGE COST OF A NEW HOUSE:
\$113,200

AVERAGE INCOME PER YEAR:
\$31,230

AVERAGE MONTHLY RENT:
\$532

COST OF A GALLON OF GAS:
\$1.16

AVERAGE COST OF A NEW CAR:
\$12,750

TUITION TO HARVARD UNIVERSITY:
\$23,514

ANNUAL AVERAGE PRICE
DOMESTIC CRUDE OIL:
\$16.75/bbl

Sources: thepeoplehistory.com, inflationdata.com

Monsanto. She is the author of the memoir *Just a Girl: Growing Up Female and Ambitious* about her struggles to succeed in male-dominated work settings. She is the founder of Lucinda Jackson Ventures, where she speaks and consults on empowering women in the workplace. Her story continues in *Project Escape: Lessons for an Unscripted Life* (She Writes Press, 2022) about the complex transition from hard-hitting career to retirement.

Jackson said:

With big hair, heels and a suit with shoulder pads, I'm offered my first job in the oil and gas industry in 1990. I accept the position with a pipeline company in its training department that focuses primarily on health, environment and safety, but it's really mostly safety. I'm one of only a few women and we keep busy recording incidents, tracking days away from work and total recordable injuries of all employees who've suffered an accident.

Over the next few decades, I move around upstream, midstream and downstream, working in marketing, site cleanup, research, technical

service, operations and much more. I witness a huge transformation in health, environment and safety strategy, approaches and actions.

The focus on safety increases incrementally. Safety becomes the No. 1 priority as companies realize the costs — both financial and reputational — that lack of safety incurs. We create an entire culture that includes tenets of operation, operation excellence, hazard identification and personal responsibilities such as, "If you see it, you own it." We delve into human performance to understand the psychology and behaviors behind safety. The industry changes from a focus on recordable injuries to a deep dive into prevention of fatalities. It morphs from personal safety to process safety — looking at our industrial processes, their risks and how we can mitigate them. It's a huge transition — all for the better as we work to reduce the hazards of our complicated industry.

In 1990, we don't talk about environmental concerns much at all. We follow all the



Lucinda Jackson, in one of her early roles as senior environmental scientist for Chevron, in the western Niger Delta in Delta State, Nigeria (1998). Her work on site assessment and restoration of mangrove forests spanned multiple years with regular stays in Nigeria to train and turn over projects to local staff.

compliance rules and test for air emissions and clean up oil spills, but environment is barely on the radar. As I am an environmentalist, this bothers me, and I bring it up constantly. We begin creating a business case for why we should concern ourselves more with environmental issues, collecting data on the cost of lawsuits, negative media attention, reputational damage, cleanup costs and fines. Others start to listen and we hire a few more environmental people as both our awareness and regulations increase.

We move from strict compliance to prevention of environmental accidents and releases. Outside groups apply more pressure and soon stockholders and investors want to know how we are controlling these risks in our industry. The words “sustainability” and “life cycle analysis” pop up. Then the real kicker: “climate change” and “reduction of carbon.” The industry moves from climate change denial to an acceptance to be part of the solution. We hire new qualified people and groups reorganize to try to address this, but I see it’s difficult for the industry to make significant changes and there are opposing forces. On the one hand, we spend large budgets on carbon capture and sequestration technology and pump out annual climate reports, but we also support third party organizations that push back on climate change rules. It’s a difficult period we are in now as we grapple with this other huge transition, like we did with safety.

More women are around, and entry-level hiring of women and minorities is much more balanced than when I started in our business. And, thankfully, we have replaced the suits and heels with comfortable hard-toed sneakers and jeans.

We’ve made tremendous strides in health, environment and safety. I’m proud of the number of lives we’ve saved with better safety practices. But we still have fatalities, so our job is not done. The oil and gas business is risky, and we need to keep our vigilance.

Giant leaps have occurred in the environmental areas, and I’m also proud of the sites we’ve cleaned up, the species we’ve protected, the land we’ve restored and the emissions and spills we’ve reduced. But we need to always do more to become truly sustainable and now to address climate change.

We’ve moved from little awareness to

diversity to equity to inclusion to justice as our understanding of employees and managers evolves. But there remain significant gaps, such as the lack of executive level leadership positions filled by underrepresented groups. Our amazing industry continues to transform, now confronted with renewable energy sources beyond oil and gas. It must never stop changing to stay a viable, responsible global business. ♠

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Ponton is a journalist, petroleum landman and author of Breaking the GAS Ceiling: Women in the Offshore Oil & Gas Industry (Modern History Press, 2019), as well as a former forbes.com energy contributor. She writes on a wide variety of topics, but her focus is on women and their achievements. She is a regular contributor to NAPE magazine.



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