

The Oil Within

“A passion for what you are doing makes the difference,” says Susan Morrice, co-founder and chairperson of Belize Natural Energy – which she believes explains why, after 50 companies had unsuccessfully spent many years looking for oil in Belize, she struck lucky with her first well.

JANE WHALEY

“The background to this story is that 50 oil companies, over 50 years, spending \$450 million, had all searched for oil in Belize – and failed.”

Geologist Susan Morrice fell in love with the Central American country and its people on her first visit and decided that if she could discover and develop oil in the right way she could make a positive difference in the country.

The Entrepreneurial Spirit

Susan was born and brought up in Northern Ireland and fondly remembers family outings and picnics when she was little, jumping around on rocks in famous geological sites like the Mountains of Mourne and the Giants Causeway. “I always loved rocks,” she says, “but it was some time before I realized that you could study and learn about them and that could be a real job! I remember thinking ‘Wow, that’s amazing – I’m going to do that!’” She studied Natural Sciences at Trinity College Dublin, graduating in 1976, at a time when, as she points out, “geology was really changing as the concepts of plate tectonics took hold. I love the fact that geology is an evolving science, not all tied up, and you can still keep asking questions. Even in exams at university, you can be asked to give your ideas rather than provide a right or wrong answer.”

Soon after graduating, Susan moved to America to work for American-Canadian Stratigraphic, who sent her around the world, learning how the industry works as she went. She then joined Denver-based Knight Royalty as a frontier specialist. “A great job! I love mapping and

working out the geology of new areas and I went around with the ‘landmen’ talking to the farmers and landowners. It was both fascinating and empowering,” Susan says.

“When I came to the US I had the assumption that all Americans were entrepreneurs, so I determined that I would set up my own company as soon as possible. Knight Royalty were very accommodating and I worked part time for them while I started out, but I soon had plenty of work and began employing other consultants. We had projects all over the world, from Ireland, the UK and mainland Europe to Africa, Asia, Latin America and the USA. It was wonderful to brainstorm with these specialists, not all from traditional oil industry backgrounds, including mining consultants and engineers. I believe that it is important to break down subject barriers in order to let the mind soar.”

International Pavilion

Susan continues: “In the early 90s the low oil price meant the industry was in a decline, but I realized that while fellow geologists in Denver were out of work, there were still plenty of exploration opportunities around the globe – but how to get them together? Robbie Gries (see *GEO ExPro* Vol. 4, No.2), later the first female president of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG), asked Roger Slatt and me to head up the international part of the AAPG convention in Denver in 1994. We invited every country in the world to exhibit their oil and gas potential; 52 countries attended in the first year alone and thus the International Pavilion was born. We raised half



BNE



Susan and BNE colleagues, Breandon Raymond, Emogene Habet and Mateus Furtado.

eleven years, having also had to develop from scratch the infrastructure required to produce, develop and transport the oil to the coast, from where it is exported worldwide.

“We take a holistic approach to developing this resource so it will benefit all the people of Belize,” she explains.

“Oil is one of the main revenue generators in the country, but about 20% of the oil produced is used within Belize for electricity generation and in local industries. We are producing a range of products like propane and butane to encourage diversification, and through the development of the export terminal we see Belize becoming a major hub for the Caribbean and Central America.

“The important thing is to make a difference. BNE, which has 170 employees, is 99% Belizean and everything we do is for and about the country. BNE was founded on the deep-rooted belief that the country has the energy resources – both hydrocarbons and human – to transform the future. Our model is all about the people and their inclusion in the business; for example, crude oil haulage is outsourced to local truck operators, although they must conform to our very high safety standards.

“I strongly believe that we all have the energy and force to realize our dreams,” Susan continues. “The Educo seminar enabled me to focus on my goals, dispel my doubts and see a clearer vision for the future. I found it so inspiring that all BNE employees also attend the seminars to help them understand their own minds and the vision for the company and country.”

Global Partnerships

That vision is to be the total energy solution throughout the Caribbean and Central America. “At the beginning of this century Belize, like most countries in the area, was sliding into financial difficulties. Oil has turned that around and the country is at the forefront of this new holistic approach,” Susan explains. “Belizeans have great respect for their environment so we needed to find new ways of working to include that. I believe we have survived the current downturn because the Educo training of BNE personnel has led to innovation and diversification in the company and the development of everyone’s full potential. Our aim is for BNE to be the most holistically balanced energy company in

the world, crossing boundaries and industries; for example, we produce electricity from our gas flare for use by local communities.

“We have become a beacon for holistic development and we want to share the secret of our success with everyone. We welcome visiting dignitaries from all over the world to tour BNE to learn about the new business model. Visitors notice the energy and creativity in the BNE personnel and their pride in their work and their country.

“We are really excited that in October, 2015 Belize and the United Arab Emirates signed a bilateral trade agreement, which will bring investment into Belize from the UAE. The two countries share a vision – that oil is just the start of the economic success story, and diversification is key, as the UAE has proved since oil was first discovered there 50 years ago.”

All in the Mind

“As exploration geologists, we pull together lots of data and information, but we can’t know everything – that final decision to drill is always a leap of faith,” Susan points out. “I found that understanding my mind helped me make that leap and in the process changed a country. When we discover how our mind works and we live our full potential, we are not only more useful to ourselves but also to humanity. My passion when I started out on my career was for geology, but now it is for people. Geologists can make a difference!

“Wallace Pratt’s oft-quoted words “Oil is first found... in the minds of men”, summarizes it well. At BNE we call it ‘the oil within!’” ■

Susan at the BNE headquarters.



a million dollars from oil companies who thought it would be great to be able to access world deals and potential in one place; I became a bit like a matchmaker! It was organized and run by volunteers and it was good to see them get enthused by the idea; it ended up a huge and important event.”

For this, Susan was awarded the AAPG's Distinguished Service Award.

Susan handed over the reins of the International Pavilion after that first event so she could concentrate on her newly adopted daughter, but it proved to be a key turning point in her life when, a couple of years later, she was asked to talk to students at a business school about how she had made a success of the International Pavilion project. She realized she could not really explain it, and wondered why not everyone has the 'get up and go' to be an entrepreneur or to set and achieve high goals.

Educo Leads to Belize

“It was an eye-opener,” she explains. “I realized I knew how the earth works – but not how my own mind did. I set out on a search for a system that would enlighten me and that could also be replicated, so that other people could be open to the entrepreneurial spirit or to develop their dreams. There seemed to be a lot of talk out there about activating human potential, but not much action.

“I finally found what I was searching for in Educo, started by Dr Tony Quinn, which had the proven academic background and track record I was looking for. I attended the Educo Seminar in 2002 and, feeling fulfilled and focused, decided to follow my long-held geological gut feeling and look seriously for oil in Belize.”

Susan had first visited Belize in 1983. “Like others before me, I looked at the 50 dry holes, but I also saw potential,” she explains. “I had also fallen in love with the country and the people. With renewed self-belief, I went back and together with a Belizean partner, Mike Usher, who shared the same passion and had also attended the same Educo seminar, we started Belize Natural Energy (BNE). We threw out all the preconceived ideas – including the ones about there being no oil in Belize and that the only possible reservoirs would be carbonates – and started looking at the country with fresh eyes, an open mind and a clear structure.

“Against all odds, with 500,000 acres (over 2,000 km²) in which to choose a single location and finances for just one shot, the impossible happened – a discovery in one. (Statistically it takes 10–15 wildcats before a discovery.) Sadly, however, Mike Usher had died the year before, but amazingly enough, on the exact anniversary of his death one year later, on June 24th, 2005, the first oil in Belize was discovered by BNE – in a sandstone reservoir.” There are now ten producing wells named in honor of Mike in the Spanish Lookout field in Western Belize.

Holistic Approach

“In 2007 we discovered a second field, Never Delay, about 20 km east of Spanish Lookout, which, although a more complicated fractured reservoir, we believe is commercial,” Susan continues. “We have now produced 11 MMbo in just



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