

## PERSPECTIVES

## For Pat O'Shaughnessy of National Drilling & Services Company, 'It's like I was programmed to be in this industry'

By Linda Hsieh, associate editor

HIS NAME MAY be Irish, but ask **Pat O'Shaughnessy** and he'll tell you he doesn't feel Irish. Raised halfway around the world in Kuwait, where his father worked for **Kuwait Oil Company**, being an expatriate was the first life he ever knew. In fact, when he returned to his native Ireland for high school, he felt like a complete outsider. "It was an amazing culture shock. I felt like I didn't fit in at all," he recalled.

Likewise, the oil business was the first industry he ever knew; and in any other, he was an outsider. Even when he was a young child, his father often brought well control pioneers such as **Red Adair** and **Myron Kinley** home for lunch. "From an early age, I mixed with people who were 100% oilfield," he said.

After graduating from high school, Mr O'Shaughnessy realized he couldn't think of any profession except the oil business. "I tried a few part-time jobs, but I couldn't stand any of them. Yet the first day I went to work on a rig, time flew by. It's like I was programmed to be in this industry," he said.

Mr O'Shaughnessy, now group general manager of Muscat, Oman-based **National Drilling & Services Company**, began his career in 1965 as a roughneck on land rigs for **Drilcon** in Australia. By 1970, he had shifted offshore and was supervising jackups and drillships for **West Australia Petroleum** (now **Chevron**). Over the following decades, he managed to explore nearly every aspect of the drilling business, from drilling on the groundbreaking Beryl Alpha platforms in 1970s North Sea, to managing a start-up drilling company during the height of the last oil boom, to overseeing the largest onshore turn-key drilling program ever awarded in Oman.

In 1985, he was hired by **Forasol-Foramer** and began a 7-year whirlwind tour of the world, leaving his mark in France, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Syria, the United States and West Africa. Somewhere in there, he also squeezed in a firefighting stint in Kuwait.

He arrived in the country in 1991, just after the end of the Gulf War. Initially there to secure drilling contracts, Mr O'Shaughnessy soon realized that the country's biggest con-



**"The whole country was on fire," Pat O'Shaughnessy said, when he and his crew went to Kuwait in 1991 to help fight well fires. "It was a tremendously cooperative effort from Kuwait Oil Company, all of the contractors involved, and everybody who was on the ground," he said.**

cern at the time wasn't drilling new wells but taming the hundreds of wells on fire. Rather than leaving, he took on a firefighting contract instead. He ended up leading 2 Forasol-Horwell firefighting teams and was even followed day and night by a French television crew. It was an exciting 8 months that was difficult to come down from, Mr O'Shaughnessy said. "We had been at a fever pitch for so long, working extraordinary hours under extraordinary conditions. It took some time afterwards to adjust to our regular jobs again."

### THE FUTURE

Although Mr O'Shaughnessy said he's unlikely to retire anytime soon, he's already busy passing on his 4-decades-plus of industry knowledge to the next generation of rig personnel. "We have 1 or 2 missing generations between the '80s boom and now, and that's contributing to a big personnel gap," he said. "But hopefully my generation is imparting knowledge as fast as we can to those who will follow us so the industry can continue with an assurance of competence. ♠

### 'People are the backbone of this industry'

**Q:** What wisdom would you give to new rig crews coming onboard?

**A:** First, you have to recognize that people are the backbone of this industry. You have to want to work with people.

Two, you must be quality-driven. Know that quality always wins in the end — even if you might have to wait some time to see the reward.

Third, you must figure out how to make safety work in your operation. There are no silver bullets with HSE. You have to accept the repetitive nature of dealing with safety because there are always new people to train and old problems that recur time and again. You should be innovative where you can, but you also have to keep doing the same-old if that's what it takes. HSE can be a repetitive process, but you can't lose heart. ♠