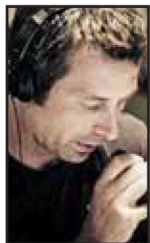


Feeling paralyzed by oil prices? Try giving back

These days it seems you can't pick up a newspaper or turn on a radio without hearing about lawmakers, policies and tax codes relating to the Bakken oil



JASON SPIESS
For *Bakken Breakout Weekly*

fields. Many folks with ties to oil and gas are scrambling, recalculating and dealing with reality.

This reality of volatile oil prices has produced some who are worried and anxious. Then there are some who are, well, let's call it "deer in the headlights" syndrome. My Uncle Keith used to call it "the paralysis of analysis." Personally, I refer to that moment when you realize you have so many hurdles, unknowns and obstacles presented to you, that it is easier to go into a corner, curl up into the fetal position and rock back and forth.

Then there are those who are going to their respective well pad every day. Those who are hauling hot oil and those who are, dare I say it, pushing paper in cubicles. The oil and gas machine continues. Part of that machine is giving back to the community.

After being immersed in Big Oil for the past three and a half years, I can honestly say one of the biggest elements of oil and gas that's missing in the media coverage is their community development and event planning.

There have been stories here and there, but they are primarily surface and quick-hit articles. Or the dollars of a donation make the headline, overshadowing all the blood, sweat and tears put into the community event.

Looking deeper into the community relations portion of oil and gas, it is amazing how much administering, organizing and volunteering employees of Big Oil donate. Whether it is a blood drive or a barbecue or a holiday concert, these events are designed to give the public a community offering designed to improve their quality of life.

"We've got to make sure we have quality of life throughout North Dakota, and certainly throughout western North Dakota. And with the energy development and the growth come growing pains and we have to address those, and that certainly means state, federal and local governments, but the private sector being good corporate citizens and company

partners," said Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D. "This is a long-term energy play and long-term growth and development for our great state. We need to continue to work together in the public and private sector to maintain and continue to grow that quality of life. There is a lot more to do here because of the growing pains, but we are committed to improving the quality of life for the people."

One event that involves a gaggle of logistics is Pick Up the Patch, launched in April 2012 by the North Dakota Petroleum Council. According to the NDPC, thousands of miles of roadways have been cleaned and the program won a Chairman's Stewardship Environmental Partnership Award from the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission in 2013. This takes multiple agencies, departments, companies and ride shares. These "giving back" hours can often can become more burdensome than benevolent for a company, yet they continue to participate.

EnerPlus is one company involved with Pick Up with the Patch and Jessie Koerner, communications/public affairs coordinator, believes it has been a success for more than clean reasons.

"Pick Up the Patch has been a great event to participate in. Last year, we went to work on the Mandaree basketball courts, playground and surrounding area," Koerner said. "The various events set a strong tone for all of us at the beginning of spring: that as we emerge from the cold weather into spending more time outdoors, we need to take care of our surroundings."

Koerner sees the donation of time and money as more than community building; it's relationship building as well.

"Our priorities are safety and being a responsible operator. Engaging with our stakeholders, and being involved with the communities where we operate, allows us to answer questions, to foster relationships and to build trust," Koerner said. "It's also a fun part of our jobs, whether it's face-painting at a powwow or supporting a music teacher's effort to bring instruments into her classroom. The energy we take out of the ground has to be matched by the energy we put into our communities."

Patricia Hove, finance specialist at Neset Consulting Service, sees events like Pick Up the Patch gaining ground in their respective communities.

"I have been in charge of Tioga's Pick Up the Patch for the past couple years and each year seems to be getting big-

ger and better. Not only have we just had local companies and volunteers but we have also had companies and volunteers from the surrounding communities come help out," Hove said. "I think that each year we have done the Pick Up the Patch in Tioga it has been a huge success. Each year we cover more miles than the last. This benefits the community in a way of appearance. The main area we cover is coming in from Highway 2 to Tioga. Ditches completely full of garbage is not what we want newcomers' first impression of Tioga to be."

Hove sees Neset Consulting as a leader in community development, reaching

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Jessie Koerner

beyond oil and gas interests.

"Neset Consulting Service employees have been part of numerous events that have taken place in our community. Whether it be a local golf tournament or the Million Barrel Party that Neset Consulting Service hosted for the North Dakota Petroleum Council and the state of North Dakota," Hove said. "Neset Consulting Service has been very eager to help put on events that benefit not only our industry but also our community. Kathleen Neset, president of Neset Consulting Service, is on the board of many local and statewide organizations. Therefore her employees get the opportunity to take part in many events that take place in our community as well as statewide."

MBI Energy Services is another company that has been active in community relations and event engineering since the oil activity returned to the state. Tiffany Steiner, marketing and communications director, organizes and participates in trade shows and industry gatherings, plus community events like Pick Up the Patch, MBI's Make A Wish Foundation BBQ, the Angel Tree and its next community fundraiser, the API Gumbo Cook-Off on Feb.21.

According to the American Petroleum Institute website, the annual API Dickinson Chapter Gumbo Cook-Off raises about \$10,000 a year for scholar-

ships and other charities. MBI hopes to top that number in 2015. Additionally, MBI's third annual Make A Wish BBQ is scheduled for June 19 in Dickinson.

The reality of volunteering hours to community endeavors is just as real as the current oil prices. Even with the current drop, energy companies are still planning events, donating money and building communities – all signs of a good economy and healthy community growth.

Koerner understand this and believes EnerPlus backs it up with action.

"Our nearly 150 employees donated over 3,000 hours of service in 2013 in North Dakota, Montana and Colorado. Many also support EnerPlus event sponsorships, or industry events with their participation. Last summer, nearly half of our field staff in North Dakota and Montana – roughly 25 people – helped with city centennials and annual town festivals. We had a strong presence at the Mandaree powwow as well, with 10-15 employees there each day. It's easy to get people to come out and support local events; there's a genuine care and responsibility when it comes to our communities."

Further, Koerner said, "It's great to be able to support various community ventures financially – sometimes that's what's needed over direct manpower. EnerPlus is a hands-on company, though. I'm proud to say that our monthly Adopt-a-Well program with the eighth-graders at Mandaree School is a very popular event for employees to present at. Co-workers want to take the initiative to participate in parades, and hand out candy. In events where we help fix up houses or playgrounds, I've even learned which of my colleagues I'll be calling to help retila a bathroom or fix my sink. The bottom line is that not only do EnerPlus employees work in North Dakota, they live there, too. When we support a community initiative, we're taking care of each other, our neighbors and the people we haven't had a chance to meet yet."



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