

The state of Bakken trade shows

CEO's & CFO's fly in, run meetings, call it a wrap and head out of town



By Jason Spiess
For The Drill

questions and engage. Product reps love talking about their product to anyone who will listen and real estate developers understand the value of word-of-mouth and distant relatives. Some charge hundreds of dollars for a day pass and this generally keeps the casual attendees out. One shift you may see trade show planners make is a public viewing session or "free day" to get the general population into the show.

Then again, maybe the trend of the trade show is heading more towards the sage wisdom of the 20-something-year-old from the last conference. Now this person had never set foot in the Bakken, but was very confident with understanding the shale play. This confidence was demonstrated at the last trade show I attended while attempting to answer a question from a speaker/sponsor/attendee who wanted to know where all the decision-makers were. Before I could open my mouth, this confident comment was uttered in interruption. "There might not be top-level decision-makers here, but we are the people who can get you in touch with the people who work with the decision-makers," the person said.

Well there you go. If that sounds like your type of networking event, might I recommend the grass-fed lamb at the Toasted Frog. It is like butta in your mouth.

In conclusion, I would say this about the state of the Bakken trade show: I have seen the trade show folks tweak and fudge things here and there to try and figure out how to put on the best show possible for Bakken enthusiasts.

It can't be easy to try and please the diversity. For me personally, I always considered myself a fan of capitalism and understood the basic workings of how the cycles operated. Then I went to my first oil show. Yeah, I don't know jack about capitalism compared to anyone who has worked in oil and gas for the better part of a decade. The gears it takes to make the oil and gas machine operate are expansive, elaborate and even simple. Just like capitalism.

This "State of the Bakken Trade Show" isn't meant to be negative or disparaging in anyway, rather as a reminder the trade show season is upon us. If you haven't been to one yet, I recommend going just for the sure awesomeness of the industry itself. So much is bigger than life. The word "awesome" actually has a true meaning at a Bakken trade show.

I will end with an "open letter" sidebar. If you are in oil and gas, let's make the 2014 Williston Basin Petroleum Conference on May 20-22 one to remember. If you are a CEO, president or chairman of a Fortune 500 company, come on up to North Dakota and spend a few days talking and hanging out with the locals. Bring your family, make it a mini-vacation. Eat at a cafe in Bowman, visit the Turtle Mountains, walk the Missouri River and see if Eric Sevareid was right when he referred to our state as the rectangular blank spot in the nation's mind.

Jason Spiess is a multi-media journalist and host of Building the Bakken Radio show. Building the Bakken Radio can be heard in Dickinson on 93.9 KXDI-FM Dickinson and 101.1 KDSR-FM Williston Sundays at 8 a.m. MST and Wednesdays at 6 p.m. MST. To see if your listening area carries the program or to see the entire Building the Bakken Media Network, visit www.buildingthebakken.com. Spiess can be contacted at jason@buildingthebakken.com.

community events like rodeos and high school activities.

The other question I am asked quite a bit by trade show staffers and attendees is about the speakers and event topics. In my opinion, the show topics have gotten better over the past three to four years, but the speaker stroke has diminished. Perhaps that is why the topics have improved, the conference planners' minds are working overtime trying to tie in all the new information, speaker cred and interests.

Case and point: several years ago it was common to see a U.S. senator, Congressman or secretary-level of some sort speaking or keynoting a conference.

Then it went to live video feed from Washington, D.C., to a recorded video message played over the giant Orwellian-sized display screens. I have even noticed over the past six months or so, economic developers and executive directors arrive, speak and leave immediately after their commitment. A few directors have even canceled the day before.

From the private sector, the speakers, presenters and guests have transitioned over the years from CEOs, venture capitalists and presidents to general managers and vice presidents. Looking at my trade show business cards pile from the past six months, I see more regional managers and marketing personnel than anything else.

That hierarchical range of the attendee is certainly going to sell out the exhibit hall. Marketing and sales are the people who work the exhibit booths, but don't really care too much about the presentations. So you have an interesting crossroad with trade shows speakers presenting information that is very useful to understanding the Bakken play, yet only high-level decision-makers can truly understand its value. Listening to the conversations of the attendees over the past few months, I can honestly say most are more interested whether to order the filet with Bearnaise sauce or the blackened swordfish on the company's credit card than say the water issues in the Bakken.

Hanging out on the exhibit hall is a very interesting experience because so much is business-to-business product and service. Yet there has even been more chatter the past nine months about increasing Ma and Pa Kettle-types at the shows.

Big oil wants the community there to ask

NDSU football players talk about visiting home for the holidays and their overall wild ride

Moody, Lechler reflect on growing up in North Dakota

By Jason Spiess
For The Drill

FARGO, N.D. — Western North Dakota natives Nate Moody and Landon Lechler have been riding the North Dakota boom as of late. Only their boom isn't using words like gas and frac in the oil field.

Moody and Lechler, rather, are using the words pass and sack on the gridiron for the three-time Football Championship Subdivision national champion North Dakota State University Bison.

One incredible chapter in North Dakota history that is playing out before our eyes involves the intersection or nexus of two booming stories. The Bakken Boom and the NDSU Boom.

NDSU's recent championship victory over Towson has become yet another chapter in the successful story of NDSU's transition to Division I. Three consecutive FCS national championships, a legitimate reputation for knocking off Bowl Subdivision opponents and a fan base to rival SEC schools are just a few of the chapters in the ongoing NDSU story. In fact, NDSU's fan base is so well known, ESPN chose Fargo this past season as a host site for College GameDay, which is considered the pinnacle of collegiate football broadcasts.

North Dakota and NDSU are making their names known in many circles of life and industry.

For Moody, a Dickinson, N.D., native, the oil activity was just beginning when he left for NDSU to pursue an education in finance and play football.

"I really didn't grow up in it, I just saw the start of the it during my high school years," Moody said. "When I was a sophomore and junior I started noticing more people coming into Dickinson due to the oil activity."

Since then, every trip home for Moody has been a memorable one.

"Every time I go home now something is different," Moody said. "A few more apartment complexes go up, I see a Menards is going up. Every time I go home something is changing."

Lechler also grew up in western North Dakota and eastern Montana before moving to across the state to attend NDSU and play offen-

sive tackle for the Bison. The Beach, N.D., native, recalls growing up in the community before the recent oil and gas activity.

"It was a great place to grow up," Lechler said. "Small-town atmosphere, everyone knows everyone, ag community, a good place to grow up."

Lechler, a sophomore studying agriculture, returns home as much as he can to "help out on the family farm," and has noticed some changes in the Beach community.

"The oil activity has certainly changed things out there," Lechler said. "It has its good and bads and people can argue all they want, but I think it has been good. It brings a lot of commerce in and people together."

While Lecher was in the final years of high school in Beach, Moody was in Fargo and started hearing of the growing pains in western North Dakota.

Moody recalls hearing about a variety of issues in his hometown, knowing it was national news.

"When the oil activity first came, there was all this talk about gangs coming to town," Moody said. "Rent was going up, older people who were retired couldn't afford rent anymore. But not a lot lately, I guess there's good and bad when change happens."

Moody's recent trip home during holiday break stayed true showing signs of major change in his hometown of Dickinson.

"There's a new hospital that looks like it is going to open soon. There's also a new clinic I haven't seen before that looks like it is operational already," Moody said of the Sanford Health Dickinson Clinic that opened Feb. 17. "More apartment buildings, more people and more diesel trucks."

When asked if Moody is beginning to feel like a visitor in his hometown, Moody said, "Yeah, a bit. Whenever I go home, the first thing I do is take a drive around and see what is new, see what I missed. So yeah, you could say that."

Moody's football schedule makes it difficult to watch the Dickinson High School football team compete, but he said he does make it back for a basketball game or two.

Continued on Page B5

Thinking Big... GOING BEYOND in the Bakken

Think Big. Go Beyond.

www.AE2S.com

Our Roots Run Deep. In 1998, AE2S opened an office in Williston, ND. Since that time, our services and presence throughout the region have grown with additional offices in Dickinson, Watford City, and Minot.

Committed to the Region. From community planning and infrastructure development to water supply, reuse, and depot design, we are committed to helping cities and industries invest wisely and grow strategically. Together, we will think big and go beyond - now and in the future.

Advanced Engineering and Environmental Services, Inc. (AE2S) North Dakota and Montana Offices:
Bismarck | Dickinson | Grand Forks | Fargo | Minot | Williston | Watford City | Great Falls | Kalispell

**WATER ENGINEERING | WASTEWATER ENGINEERING | CIVIL ENGINEERING | LAND DEVELOPMENT | SURVEY/MAPPING/GIS
INSTRUMENTATION & CONTROLS | ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING | STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING | FINANCIAL/ASSET MANAGEMENT**