



Mechanical Engineering  
Academy of Distinguished Alumni

## **Denise Elston, P.E.**

*Honorary Mechanical Engineer, 2013*

BSME, University of Houston, 1985

*Vice President of HSSE Upstream Americas  
(Retired)*

Shell Oil Company

Denise Elston was born in East Orange, New Jersey, a suburb of NYC. At a young age, her family moved to Houston, where her father worked in chemicals trading. She was raised on the west side of Houston and attended Westchester High School. While working full time, Denise attended the University of Houston, was involved in ASME, and was president of Pi Tau Sigma. She was awarded several academic scholarships, including one from the Gas Processors association, where her father was in the audience. She received her BS in Mechanical Engineering in 1984.

In January 1985, she began her career with Shell Oil Company at the Deer Park Manufacturing Complex as plant engineer, where she supported chemical units in a 24/7 operation. Denise then moved into a projects engineering role, delivering refinery/chemical plant improvements of over \$100 million.

In 1994, Denise was promoted to operations manager for a Liquid and Solid Resins unit and Environmental reclamation plant. They had 24/7 operations, and she was accountable for 70 employees regarding safety, environmental, quality, and profit/loss performance. In addition, she led and participated in teams to reorganize site operations to align with the globalization of the chemicals business.

In 2001, Denise accepted an engineering manager role in Chemicals R&D, working on the embryonic stages of projects with staff based in Houston and Amsterdam. This was followed by a role in 2005 where she led the development and globalization of engineering assurance processes for projects that crossed all lines of businesses. She set up offices in the U.S., the Netherlands, Malaysia, India, and Canada. It was in this role that Denise impressed the Upstream E&P Projects organization and was offered a general manager assignment working on

North American projects in offshore Alaska, the Gulf of Mexico, oil shale, oil sands, LNG, and the unconventional facilities engineering in New Orleans, designing and building offshore platforms for deep water application. In 2010, she was awarded the National ASME Fredrick W. Taylor Award– cited for distinguished work in the field of engineering management. The Frederick W. Taylor Award is named after the 25th president of ASME, who was known as the “father of scientific management”.

Denise was recruited in 2011 to become the vice president of safety, environment and sustainable development for the Upstream Americas business. In this role, she was responsible for 400 employees to improve overall focus on safety and the environment, along with sustainable development for projects and new country entries to maintain Shell’s license to operate. In 2013, having achieved financial independence, she retired from Shell.

Throughout her career, Denise believed in serving the community by serving on the UT ME External Advisory Committee and the 35-in-5 Women in Mechanical Engineering Committee. She was a member of the Engineering & Construction Contracting Executive Board, and a member of the ASME Global Engineering Managers Conference Advisory Board. During her time with Shell, she created and led a mentoring circle for working moms and an angel network of women helping women.

Denise has been married to her soulmate Rob for 26 years and has three boys, ages 20, 22 and 24. In retirement, Denise started a consulting firm, and a small business focused around her love of antiques & home décor. She enjoys traveling and spending time at their house in the mountains in Utah.