



Mechanical Engineering
Academy of Distinguished Alumni

Thomas Keller Towns, P.E.
Distinguished Mechanical Engineer, 2014

BSME, The University of Texas at Austin, 1982

Drilling Middle East Advisor
ExxonMobil Development Company

Thomas “Keller” Towns, Sr. was born in Luling, Texas (Pop. 5,500). In 1966, after first grade, his family moved to Kingsville, Texas (Pop. 26,000) when his father was transferred by Humble Oil & Refining Company (later to become ExxonMobil) to the King Ranch Gas Plant. His mother taught physical education at H.M. King High School, where he graduated in 1977.

He enrolled in the fall of 1977 at Texas A&I University (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville). Then, he transferred to The University of Texas at Austin in 1978 to study mechanical engineering. He had summer internships in plant engineering (1979) at the General Motors assembly plant in Arlington, Texas; reservoir engineering (1980) at Texas Oil & Gas Corporation in Dallas, Texas; and drilling engineering (1981) at Sohio Alaska Petroleum Company in Anchorage, Alaska (later merged into British Petroleum).

In July of 1982, he began his career in Houston, Texas with Exxon Company, U.S.A. as a drilling engineer. Over the next seven years, he drilled offshore wells in the Gulf of Mexico, California, and Alaska. In May of 1989, he deployed to the oil spill response team in Valdez, Alaska, which was followed by an operations/reservoir engineering role for Alaska’s giant Prudhoe Bay field. In 1992, he transferred to Exxon Company International and spent 4 years drilling wells in Norway, Indonesia, and Chad (Africa). Then in 1996 he moved to a planning role for Exxon’s Diana/Hoover discoveries in the Gulf of Mexico. After formation of Exxon

Development Company in 1998, he joined the “core development team” charged with expediting Angola Block 15 & Brazil’s Albacora Leste discoveries from concept to first production.

Beginning in 2000, he spent the next 8 years in various roles supporting development of the Crazy Horse discovery (operated by BP and later renamed Thunder Horse) in the Gulf of Mexico. He leveraged ExxonMobil’s technical expertise to help the project team deliver industry’s first 15,000 psi subsea high temperature development in 6,300 feet of water. Then in 2008 he moved to the ExxonMobil Exploration Company for 2 years to support new opportunities and optimize utilization of deep water rigs under long term contract. In 2010, he was named drilling Middle East advisor and has spent 6 years focused on management of drilling operations in Qatar, Iraq/Kurdistan, and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

Keller has been a member of ExxonMobil’s recruiting team at The University of Texas at Austin for 8 years and helped employ more than 35 engineers. He served 4 years on the External Advisory Committee (EAC) for the Department of Petroleum and Geosystems Engineering in the Cockrell School of Engineering and chaired the committee in 2012-13. Currently, he is serving on the EAC for the Department of Mechanical Engineering.

Besides giving his time, he and his wife have gifted two endowed scholarships in 2010 to help students obtain a degree in mechanical engineering.