

Written by Robert D. Gunn (2009)

With an infectious enthusiasm, Ray Thomasson has dedicated his professional life to teaching petroleum geology and advancing energy exploration. No one has given more to the geosciences than Ray. He is a born leader, a visionary and of course, an extremely successful explorationist. Ray is a fitting recipient of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG) Michael T. Halbouty Outstanding Leadership Award.

Ray's early life was spent in Columbia, Missouri, where he attended public school and later the University of Missouri, earning a BA degree in geology in 1952 and an MA in geology in 1953. After two years as a U.S. Air Force intelligence officer, he continued his graduate education at the University of Wisconsin, where he earned a Ph.D. in geology in 1959. (Both alma maters have honored him with an Outstanding Alumnus Award.) Following graduation, Ray decided that the challenges of the business world would enhance his education before he returned to the world of academia. He chose to work for the Shell Oil Company in Midland, Texas as a junior geologist.

I first noticed Ray at the AAPG convention in Denver in 1972. Ray spoke authoritatively and knowledgably concerning the future of the Division of Professional Affairs. I thought he was a bright, good-looking, and a rather important sort of a person. He had an entourage of people following his every move. I was not surprised to later find out he was an up and coming executive with the Shell Oil Company. At that time, I considered Shell to be the foremost company in the field of innovative geological technology. Ray had much to do with this distinction. He was instrumental in the development of the team concept -- the integration of geology, geophysics and petrophysics, geochemistry and engineering in the exploration for large accumulations of oil and gas. The application of the multi-disciplinary team approach has become a productive part of Ray's life as an explorationist.

The evolution of Ray's career with Shell is a classic story of the ascent of a capable person in a dynamic environment. After gaining a solid foundation in exploration geology and geophysics in Midland, he began a natural climb up the Shell ladder,

upgrading from one management position to another every few years, including in succession Manager of Geologic Research, Manager of Exploration Economics, and Manager of the Texas, Louisiana, and Atlantic Off-Shore Division. His next advancement took him to Houston, where he served for two years as Manager of Forecasting, Planning, and Economics and then to London as head of Strategic Planning for Shell International Petroleum. Afterward, he was appointed Chief Geologist for Shell Oil USA. It was just the kind of career I would have expected of the man I first saw in Denver in 1972.

A man of Ray's ability and temperament almost always succumbs to the urge to seek his fortune as an independent. That is what Ray Thomasson did in 1977 when he left Shell to become Vice President of McCormick Oil and Gas. Three years later he formed Spectrum Oil as president and in 1983 took the position of President of Pend Orielle Oil and Gas.

During his long career with Shell, Ray moved twelve times in seventeen years. In each new location he became active in the local geological society. On the national level of AAPG he served as a member or as the chair of no fewer than eleven AAPG committees, including the Public Information, Energy Minerals, Education, Visiting Petroleum Geologist, Geophysics, Resource Evaluation, Corporate Liaison, Research, Technical Program Publications, and Committee on Committees. He also has been delegate to the House of Delegates and a member of the Advisory Council, and in 1993 he was co-convener of the Archie Conference on Visualization. He served as AAPG Associate Editor and founded columns in two publications: the "Geophysical Corner" in the *AAPG EXPLORER* and "The Geologic Column" for *THE LEADING EDGE*, an SEG publication. Ray's professional activity has deservedly earned him the Distinguished Service Award and Honorary Membership in AAPG.

Ray was the President of AAPG in 1999-2000 -- our millennium president. During his tenure as the Association's president, he felt that our organization was in need of revitalization. Shortly after taking office, Ray named Rick Fritz director of AAPG and together the two, along with the Executive Committee, actively worked to invigorate and

strengthen the Association. As part of this revitalization, Ray traveled extensively lecturing both inside and outside the U.S. During this period, he arranged for the acquisition of Data Pages, authored twelve “Presidential Pages” in the *Explorer* detailing his philosophy of oil and gas exploration, and worked diligently to develop closer ties with the SEG and SPE.

Ray has also been actively involved in the American Geological Institute (AGI) for a number of years. He is a past president of AGI, past chairman of AGI’s Foundation Board of Trustees, and a current AGI board member. Working with AGI, he initiated an educational film series that became *The Faces of Earth* to promote greater awareness of geoscience among the general public and government officials. Ray is also responsible for developing a cooperative program between local AGI societies and the National Park Service and for initiating AGI’s involvement in the five volume series by Michael Collier called *An Aerial View of Geology*. In recognition of his contributions, the AGI Foundation awarded Ray its Distinguished Service Award in 2004 and the William B. Heroy Award for Distinguished Service in 2006.

For AAPG he has been a Distinguished Lecturer, a short course lecturer, Visiting Petroleum Geologist, not only in the United States but at the University of China in Beijing. He has presented papers and organized technical sessions at regional and national meetings for which he has received two Best Paper awards and the A. I. Leveson Memorial Award. Ray taught an AAPG course on “Stratigraphic Geophysics in Carbonate Exploration” and has presented many papers at national GSA, AAPG and AAAS conventions. He has authored and presented over 100 technical papers on such diverse subjects as limestone turbidites and stratigraphy in West Texas to the stratigraphy, structure and sedimentation in the western United States. Most recently he co-authored papers on exploration opportunities in the Rockies, giant oil and gas fields of the Rockies and the mechanics of basin-centered gas deposits. Ray has lectured concerning domestic and international energy forecasts, including presentations to the executive committees of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler as well as many other business groups across the country. Ray has also testified before the Senate and

House Energy Committees in Washington D.C. where he warned of the forthcoming energy crisis.

In the late 1980's, Ray undertook a study of all geological provinces in the United States and concluded that the Rocky Mountains, with their vast areas of available acreage offered great unexplored potential and were suitable for the employment of modern technology. Based upon these findings, Ray, together with his wife, Merrill Shields, a colleague and successful attorney in her own right, conceptualized and organized their present company, Thomasson Partner Associates (TPA) in 1991. Once again Ray employed the team concept by gathering twelve individuals, including geological specialists, geophysicists, petrophysicists, geochemists, and engineers, to work as a synergistic exploration team. Ray would provide the workplace, the tools, a land and sales force, and oversight. The team's motivations, other than professional, were the overrides that came with successes and the life sustaining profit sharing. Each individual receives the majority of the override and profit on each of their projects, but the remainder is placed in a pool for everyone's benefit. What a wonderful opportunity for world class scientists to utilize the knowledge of their passion while benefiting financially. Several of these people had recently become independents because their companies had closed their Denver offices and moved elsewhere. Many had reached retirement age but were still uniquely qualified to be active explorationists. Today the team includes thirty men and women who have been extremely successful in discovering many major accumulations of oil and gas, including the giant Cave Gulch Field in the Wind River Basin of Wyoming. The experience has been most gratifying to Ray and Merrill.

Ray's four daughters and four grandchildren lovingly know that his life both as a father and as a visionary explorationist, has been exciting and successful. If he ever does retire, he and Merrill will have the satisfaction of a job well done. Merrill and Ray have experienced life together as a team of one, enjoying everything from travel, opera, skiing, and study groups, to planting daffodils at their beautiful retreat in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina.

To know him fully, one must see him in North Carolina in the beauty and grace that he and Merrill have created. The mountainside is covered with the flowers of their labor. The more you know M. Ray Thomasson, the more you respect him.

No one could be more deserving of the Michael T. Halbouty Outstanding Leadership Award than M. Ray Thomasson.