

Name Don L. Sparks



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Phone 432-689-4939

Where did you meet your spouse? Amarillo

How long have you been married? 46 yrs.

How many pets do you have? none

Children (names & ages) Jeff 45 Kevin 42 Todd 39

Grandchildren (names & ages) Jarrod 21, Joshua 18, Justin 15, Kristina 13w, Grey 13,
Grant 6, Laura Kate 6, Libby Ann 3

Favorite spare-time activities: Fish & Hunt

College & schools attended: University of Texas Austin

Are you retired? no

Occupation Oil and Gas Exploration

Minor or major occurrences and significant events since high school:

What accomplishments are you most proud of (work-related or personal life)? Distinguished
Graduate - Engineering College 2006 - University of Texas



Panhandle boy makes Permian Basin a better place

Morris Burns

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Don Sparks graduated from Amarillo High school after spending his childhood in several smaller towns in the Texas Panhandle.

Following high school he earned a degree in petroleum engineering from the University of Texas. He worked for Pioneer Natural Gas and Shell Oil Company while he was in college and went to work for Shell after graduation. Like most young men at that time Uncle Sam called him into the armed services. After completing Officer Candidate School, he served two and a half years in the U.S. Navy. Following his discharge from the Navy he returned to work for Shell in Midland as an exploitation engineer.

Shell had exploitation engineers pick locations for wells, supervise drilling, conduct drill stem tests and generally oversee the well from choosing the site, drilling the well, and following through to completion. He was assigned new duties as a reservoir engineer planning water flooding and overseeing the production at the Flanagan unit in Gaines County.

In 1968 Don left Shell and went to work for Louisiana-based Freeport Oil Company, where he was in charge of all their operations west of the Mississippi River. Still located in Midland, he drilled in New Mexico and west Texas. He found and drilled the WBD Field in Yoakum County and the West Garrett (Devonian) Field in New Mexico.

He was in charge of drilling a field south of Fort Stockton about 25 to 30 miles down a dirt road in an area where there were many problems encountered like gas kicks that were not from productive zones to losing circulation of the drilling fluid. One of his investors drove down from Midland to watch a drill stem test on a well they were drilling where they had lost circulation and spent a lot of time and money trying to get the well drilled. When they first opened up the test tool they got a good flow. They shut it in for a few hours then reopened the tool. This time the flow started good but dropped rapidly, causing the investor to become very upset, thinking it was a dry hole. Don said the investor stomped about for a while cursing their luck, got in his Cadillac and drove off in a huff. Just as he got out of sight the well began to return the lost circulation material and then a very good flow. Don was unable to contact the gentleman and since he did not return to Midland that night he was the last person to know they had made a very good well.

In 1971 Don went to work as a consultant for the firm of Bailey, Sipes, Williamson and

Runyan evaluating properties. They did estate and reservoir evaluations, but no field work. In 1973 Don and former Midland mayor Ernest Angelo formed Discovery Operating. Don, Ernest and Webb Farish formed Discovery Exploration the same year. In 1975 Don bought Ernest out of Discovery Operating and in the mid-1980's Ernest and Webb bought Don out of Discovery Exploration. Don used Midland geologist Jerry Pitts to drill a number of natural gas wells in Schleicher County. During this time he used Bob Monaghan as a landman. Bob and Jerry worked up the prospects, brought them to Don and the three would secure investors to finance the ventures.

Don brought his three sons into Discovery Operating as they finished college and were ready to enter the world of work. Jeff graduated from the University of Texas with a degree in petroleum engineering and joined the firm in 1983. Kevin earned a degree in business management also from the University of Texas and joined the firm in 1985. His youngest son Todd joined the company in 1990 after securing his bachelors degree from Baylor and a Masters in Business Administration from Texas A&M. Don kids Todd that a Masters degree from Texas A&M is an oxy moron. Discovery Operating buys very little production, choosing instead to increase production the old fashioned way, by drilling for it.

Don had an international experience in the Ukraine when he was contacted by Fred Brown asking him to help evaluate oil and gas production after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Fred had a micro bacteria business and asked Don to join with him in the Ukraine venture because of his experience in oil and gas. They had a 10 million acre area to evaluate and develop under contract with the President Leonid Kuchma of the Ukraine. They formed the West Ukraine Exploration Group but ran into problems since in the Ukraine -- they used 50-year-old technology in seismic, drilling and production.

The way they explored was to drill a circle of wells around a discovery well to define the boundaries. This was very inefficient and resulted in drilling a large number of dry holes. Don and Fred looked at what they called the passports, well files in the U.S. The first thing they tried to do was evaluate the data in the files. Under the Communist system no one group had all of the data and it was kept secret from other groups involved, which caused Don and Fred a lot of problems as they attempted to gather information. One example was that all seismic data was controlled by the KGB and they would not share it with anyone else.

Another strange quirk was they were not able to sell their natural gas. Instead they had to trade it for chicken parts or steel and then sell those for cash. Don and Fred had Halliburton hired to come in with modern equipment to drill wells and had Citibank as their financial backer. Their contact with President Kuchma was a race car driver who wanted Don to ride in some races with him. Don declined since he said the drivers had about the same amount of alcohol in them as the race car did. The driver was killed in an auto accident so Don and Fred lost their contact within the Ukrainian government. They

eventually sold out and came back to Midland to work in the friendly confines of the Permian Basin.

Don was recently honored as a Distinguished Engineer by the University of Texas, an honor only bestowed on about 225 engineers who have graduated from the school since its inception. In 2003 the Independent Petroleum Association of America, IPAA, honored Don for his work as regional governor. The honor was presented at the IPAA meeting in Boca Raton, Florida. The entire Sparks family was secretly brought in for the award presentation. Discovery was drilling a well at the time and there had been several problems with the well. Don would call Jeff for a report on how things were going, thinking he was in Midland. Angela Deaver, Don's Girl Friday at Discovery, was connecting Don and Jeff together by phone with Jeff in the same hotel all the time. After a video presentation, the three Sparks sons along with their wives and children were called to the stage. Todd said the table where they were sitting was right next to the door leading to the restrooms and they were all afraid Don would have to go to the restroom and spot them.

When Senator Teel Bivins resigned his seat to become the Ambassador to Sweden, Don threw his hat into the ring for the open seat. He has always felt a strong loyalty and allegiance to west Texas and wanted to give something back. With experience running for and being elected to the Midland Independent School District Board and his ties to the Panhandle he felt he had a chance to be elected to the Texas Senate. That was not to be and he is very happy doing what he does now, going to the office every day and working with his three sons to find and produce oil and gas. Don continues to serve on a number of committees and boards at both the state and regional levels as well as being active in the First Baptist Church where he and his wife Gwyn sing in the choir.

Morris Burns is the retired executive vice president of the Permian Basin Petroleum Association.