

CAREERS IN ENERGY

Independent Oil and Gas Producer

John Holko is President of Lenape Energy, Inc. Lenape is the parent company of a group of energy companies involved in the exploration, development, gathering, distribution and marketing of natural gas and oil, predominantly in New York and Pennsylvania. Mr. Holko is active in promoting public understanding of his industry, and serves as an officer of the Independent Oil and Gas Association of New York State. When he isn't working, he spends time relaxing with his family and enjoys outdoor recreation, including boating, biking, fishing, hunting and hiking.

Would you please give us an idea of what your job entails?

As President of Lenape Energy, my main job function is to develop strategic direction and manage operations. In actuality, my job is to develop and execute business plans to build upon opportunities that are available in our area of expertise. In addition, I am able to utilize my engineering background to assist other employees in performing their jobs. My father-in-law once told me that the key role of a manager is to instruct and inspect—I guess this would be a major role that I play in the company's operation.



John Holko

How did you get interested in energy as a career? What has your education and career path been?

I came upon my career in energy in a roundabout way. As a mechanical engineering freshman at the Pennsylvania State University (PSU), I met upperclassmen majoring in Petroleum Engineering. They had summer jobs working offshore on oil rigs and in the mountains of the western U.S., and I loved the outdoors. The broad collection of engineering disciplines wrapped into the petroleum field excited me, so I switched my major.

I graduated from PSU in the fall of 1980 and started my career as a field engineer for Halliburton Services. It was a great experience that broadened my understanding of the energy development field. I took a position as staff engineer for the Lenape Resources Corporation in 1984 and advanced to General Manager in 1987. I kept Lenape operating through the energy turmoil of the late 1980s and early 90s, and was able to acquire the company from its parent company, KCS Energy, in 1995.

What were your favorite school subjects when you were growing up?

Math and science were my favorite subjects in school, but I believe it's my natural curiosity that was and is one of my most important attributes. It took me a while to realize that it is not just what you learn, but how you apply your skills to an objective. Sometimes it is not necessarily the answer to the math or science question that is the achievement; it is the ability to grasp the process to think and analyze.

I feel that there are tremendous opportunities out there for anyone with an idea and the willingness to give it a try. Sometimes we get lost in the now and forget that the future is for those willing to dream! Where would we be today without those people who said, "I think I can do that!" and then did it?

What do you find exciting and fulfilling about your daily work?

Probably the most exciting thing about my job is that I get to dream. My days are full of the problems and issues normal to a business owner/manager, but I also have the excitement of deciding what to do next. One of the most fulfilling aspects of managing an oil and gas exploration and production company is realizing that you are involved in a core industry that impacts *everyone's* life. Without the development of energy, it would be difficult to do *anything*.

What do you find most challenging about your work?

The most challenging aspect of my work lies in changing the misperception of our industry in the eyes of the general public. Anytime the price of gasoline, oil or

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natural gas rises, the general public gets angry at the oil companies for making huge profits. They fail to realize that most of the crude oil and natural gas that is being produced today was developed years ago, and the companies are only now receiving some of the rewards for that effort. If you look at the exploration and development budgets of most companies during these current times of high prices, you will see that the companies are utilizing their additional profits to develop the energy sources of the future.

We in the industry realize that conservation and development of alternate energy sources will be key to our energy future, and most energy companies are getting involved in these projects to develop future opportunities. We also realize that we must approach our existing resources in a way that optimizes their development and utilization, while being good stewards of our environment.

A Lenape Energy, Inc. field crew installs a new well in rural New York State.



What do you see in the future for your profession? Will this field grow? What are the opportunities?

I believe oil and gas exploration and development is a rewarding career for anyone. Companies range in size from multi-billion dollar operations to just one and two man shops. Smaller companies offer the rewards associated with a job that is multifaceted and seldom becomes boring, while large companies offer advancement to managerial levels.

In addition, it is one of the few career opportunities that allows people to develop the knowledge and skill set to step out on their own and become their own bosses. The depressed environment for energy companies in the 80s has led to a shortage of workers and created opportunities in all aspects of energy operations, from the field-level workers performing well-tending and construction services to office clerical workers, engineers, geologists and geophysicists.

What would you recommend to a young person who wants to pursue this field?

I would suggest using the Web and researching some of these national sites: IPAA (Independent Petroleum Association of America), AAPL (American Association of Petroleum Landmen), DOE (U. S. Department of Energy), IOGCC (Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission), API (American Petroleum Institute), PTTC (Petroleum Technology Transfer Council) and the SWC (Stripper Well Consortium).

There are additional resources available through various state industry associations, such as the Independent Oil and Gas Association of New York (IOGANY). IOGANY is working on an educational video that will depict the operations involved in oil and natural gas well development and provide some insight into career opportunities – keep an eye out for that. Most companies in oil and gas exploration, as well as those supplying services to development companies, provide in-house education programs specific to skills needed in company operations. Contacting companies directly accesses those.

I would say that a career in oil and natural gas exploration and development could be as challenging and rewarding as a person wishes. There are no limitations if you have a willingness to learn and utilize new skills.

What's a 'Stripper Well'?

A "stripper well", also known as a "marginal well", is an oil or gas well from which production has decreased to 10 barrels a day or less. According to the U. S. Department of Energy, there are over 400,000 of these wells in the U. S. and together they produce nearly 900 thousand barrels of oil per day, 15 percent of total U. S. production. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Division of Mineral Resources reports that about 14,000 of the 70,000 stripper wells that have been drilled in New York State are currently active. In addition, many more new wells are being sited and developed each year.

If this well weren't red, you'd hardly notice it hard at work in this cornfield.

