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RECRUITING IN THE ENERGY INDUSTRY

## Big prospects in booming field

Hoping to replenish work force, companies take an early approach

By **KRISTEN HAYS**  
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Devon Energy's intern class, the company's biggest yet at nearly 180 students, took a field trip to the Barnett Shale.

KEVIN FUJII CHRONICLE

DENTON — Emily Woner is a summer away from entering college, but she's already in demand among potential employers.

She's got her eye on the University of Tulsa's petroleum engineering program, and the oil and gas industry is aggressively seeking those kinds of professionals — even before they crack a college book.

Woner, 18, of Oklahoma City, is one of nearly 180 summer interns on Devon Energy's payroll this summer, getting their hands dirty at various

U.S. and Canadian operations.

"I love math and science. I can't do anything else," she said during a recent multiday field trip at Devon's in the Barnett Shale, a 6,000-square-mile oil and natural gas reservoir buried in dense rock under farm and ranch land around Fort Worth.

The company hopes to entice Woner and other future engineers and geoscientists to sign on with Devon after graduation — even as competitors seeking the same talent come calling. This year's summer intern program is Devon's biggest ever.

"You're going to be the future of this industry and of this company," Devon President John Richels told Woner and more than 120 other interns who made the Barnett trip last month.

The race is on to replace the industry's graying work force as retirements increase in the next decade, prompting companies to ramp up recruitment efforts.

The industry essentially lost a generation of workers during the oil bust of the 1980s and 1990s when prices plunged and companies slashed headcounts. College students had little incentive to get into a business racked with layoffs, particularly when they saw more attractive and lucrative opportunities in technology and finance.

Now the industry is scrambling to recruit professionals to fill slots expected to open as veterans retire, and as pressure mounts to find

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new oil and gas deposits while squeezing more from current operations amid record prices and tight supply.

The shortage of new talent was the top concern among human resources executives at 22 top international oil and gas companies surveyed earlier this year by Rice University and the accounting firm Ernst & Young.

Nearly 88 percent said the shortage could hinder growth and financial performance if companies can't find enough professionals to handle projects and research.

"It's clear that the talent void in the oil and gas industry has transformed from an organizational challenge into a critical business issue," said Dina Pyron, a leader in Ernst & Young's human capital practice.

Recruitment efforts include enhanced internship programs.

"It's reassuring that you realize there's lots of demand and companies are hurting," said Alex Merecka, 27, a petroleum engineering master's degree student at the University of Houston who earned his bachelor's degree in geology and is among Devon's summer interns this summer.

He said he has noticed more urgency now than when he interned at Houston-based El Paso Corp. several years ago.

"There's more demand now, especially for engineers," he said.

Justin Trinter, 25, joined San Ramon, Calif.-based Chevron Corp.'s technology company in Houston a year and a half ago upon graduating from the University of Idaho with a degree in chemical engineering.

He hadn't thought about an oil industry career as he eyed other landing spots for chemical engineers, including pulp and paper, pharmaceuticals, semiconductors and mining. But the international reach of an integrated oil giant caught his eye when Chevron came recruiting.

He was hooked after an internship with Chevron two years ago. He got a feel for what he is doing now, working as a process engineer on liquefied natural gas projects.

"An internship is a great way for both the intern and the company to kind of have an extended interview and decide if the company is a good fit," he said.

Chevron has 500 interns from U.S. universities this summer, plus more from universities in other countries where the company has operations, including Australia, Nigeria and Thailand.

Half of the U.S. group recently gathered in Houston to meet with company engineers and scientists and to get an overview of its global operations. Ali Moshiri, president of Chevron's Africa and Latin America exploration and production company, said more than half indicated they speak more than one language — a key skill for a global industry.

That's less critical for independents like Devon

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and Houston-based Anadarko Petroleum Corp., which have some international operations, but focus mostly on North America.

Richels, Devon's president, said that for years, independents found a steady source of professionals from the oil majors.

"We used to joke about Shell University and stuff," he said.

That pipeline isn't flowing as freely anymore as the majors have grown increasingly global and less focused on North America, where independents are most active, he said.

So independents — which differ from oil majors in that they lack refining and marketing operations — have stepped up initial recruitment efforts.

Houston-based Anadarko has about 100 interns in a wide array of disciplines, from engineering and geology to accounting, land rights, marketing and legal.

The need for qualified workers is so great that prospects don't necessarily burn bridges when they turn down offers from firms where they interned, said Brent Longnecker, chairman of Longnecker & Associates, an executive compensation and corporate governance consultancy. In decades past, such doors were more likely to stay closed, he said.

"It's not as cutthroat. If you were a good employee, they'll keep that on file probably for many, many years to come," Longnecker said.

Also, the upcoming dearth means those going in can advance faster. Richels told Devon's interns that they will be expected to find ways to squeeze more supply while seeking new finds.

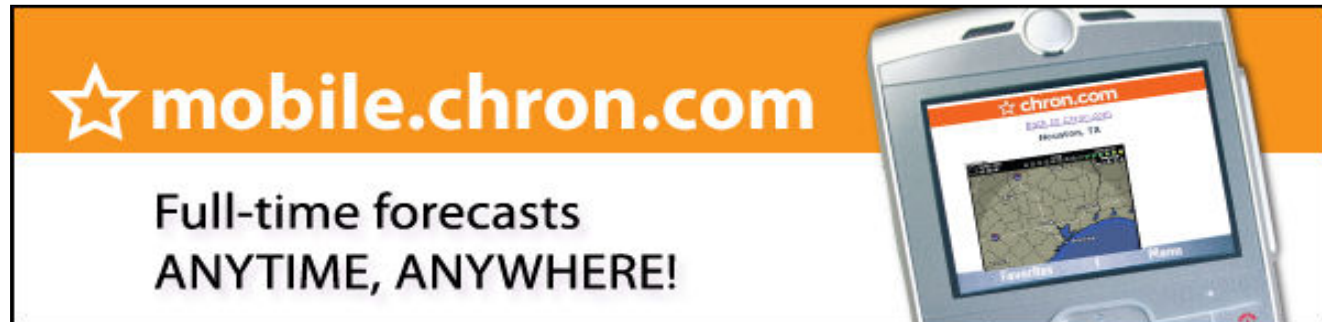
"It's a very exciting time for you in the business," Richels said. "You'll move into senior posts faster."


Woner already knew that from another reliable source in the industry — her dad, Kent Woner, who has worked for pressure pumping company BJ Services for more than 20 years.

"He's been with the industry through the good times and the bad, and he thinks now's a good enough time to get in on it," she said."

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