

PLEASANT DAYS SPRING 2019

Dancing
WITH
THE
STARS
IN
Dhahran

THE MAGAZINE FOR SAUDI ARAMCO RETIREES WORLDWIDE

Al~Ayyam Al~Jamilah

الأيام الجميلة





6 Season's Greetings

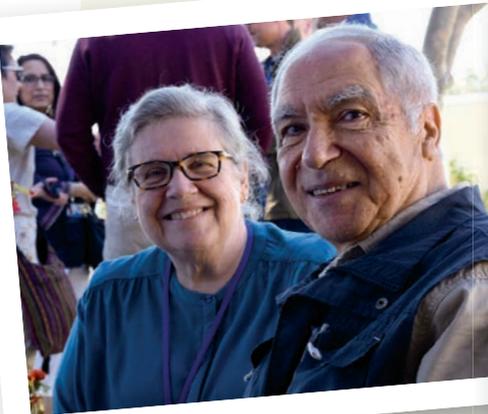
Aramcons celebrated the holidays from Houston to Austin in Texas, to Lafayette in California. The Saudi Aramco/ASC Retirees group in Houston fêted head co-secretary Verne Stueber, who stepped down from his 30-year leadership role. He and his daughter, Kathy Green, view a card thanking the 1986 retiree for his service.

8 Saudi Aramco Spotlights 75 Years of Schooling

"Larnin readin', 'ritin' and 'rithmetric" was the name of the game when the first school with a certified teacher started with one pupil in Dhahran in 1945. Much has changed, but the Saudi Aramco Expatriate Schools—serving more than 4,000 students today—remain hubs of their communities.



Our First Group Picture
Front Row - Carol Denten, Helvie Seerma,
Gracie Mae Pherson, Louise Snyder,
Judy Frye.
Back Row - Mr. Whipple, Jane Lilly,
Jimmy MacPherson, Miles Snyder,
Pinky Alexander, Carol Frye.
 Dhahran 1945



12 Aramcons Celebrate Homecomings at 4th KSA Reunion

Nearly 550 former employees and family members reveled in a reunion dubbed "Rediscover the Kingdom" this spring. Pictured are returnees (from left) Ned and Carole Karan in

Dhahran, Bert Seal in Hofuf, and Berni Wright, shown with fellow reunion volunteer Abdulaziz Alqezani, in Riyadh.

Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah

"Pleasant Days," is produced for annuitants, families and friends of Aramco, now Saudi Aramco, and its associated companies by Aramco Services Company. Website: <http://aramcoservices.com/news-media/publications>

ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO

The Editor, Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah
 Aramco Services Company
 Two Allen Center
 1200 Smith St.
 Houston, TX 77002
arthur.clark@aramcoservices.com

PRESIDENT AND CEO Basil A. Abul-Hamayel

DIRECTOR, PUBLIC AFFAIRS Abdulrahman A. Bayounis

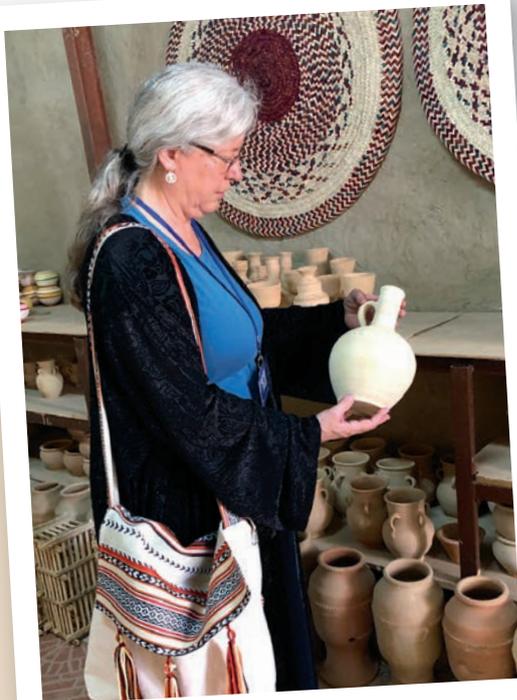
EDITOR Arthur Clark

CIRCULATION Melissa Altman

DESIGN Graphic Engine Design Studio

26 The Hole In My Heart is Healed

Jenn Harbert didn't have the chance to say goodbye to Saudi Arabia when her father, John, retired in 1977. She went "home" again for the Expatriates Reunion in March, visiting Abqaiq and the potters' caves in al-Hasa, and bid a proper adieu.



29 Get Set for Hafla 2020

Grab your hiking gear, or your camera, and make plans to attend the 32nd biennial Annuitants Reunion in Colorado Springs, Colo., Sept. 26-30, 2020. Cohosts John Palmer and Doreen Cumberford, and Doug and Elizabeth Cook, promise a colorful fall outing for all.



30 "Wow!" say Veteran Sailors

Marvin and Ruth Stark love to sail. Early this year they made a their second Panama Canal crossing from Atlantic to Pacific in their 44-foot catamaran, *Microbe*—getting up close and personal with ships like this on the way.

36 Aramco Gals Show Their Stuff In the Skies

Katherine Trench (DH89) joined American Airlines in the cockpit in 2001, when this photo was taken. Julie Cruze (RT93) became a pilot for United Airlines in 2014. Through hard work each woman made her high-flying career dream come true.



Cover: Retiree Carl Kotapish, who attended the Fourth KSA Expatriates Reunion with his wife, Sharon, took "Dancing with the Stars" to new heights with Johar al-Dossary, leader of a Dammam folkloric troupe, at the Saudi Aramco Employees Assn. dinner March 14. It was among 110-plus activities for reunion participants. Photo by Arthur Clark.



Where are You, Heather Strange?

November 1, 2018

Does anyone know the whereabouts of Heather Strange? We are fortunate

to own a still-life oil by her father, Reg Strange, with his self-portrait reflected in the glass vase.

We do not know whether Reg painted himself into any

of his other artwork. Heather, if you are out there, we would really like to be in touch.

January 27, 2019

In 1953, Dad (Harry Snyder), Mom (Olive) and I attended University of Michigan's summer session. We took a course given by Prof. George Cameron called "History and Culture of the Ancient Near East."

Recently on a trip back to Ann Arbor to visit my granddaughter, Lori, who is now a sophomore there, I had

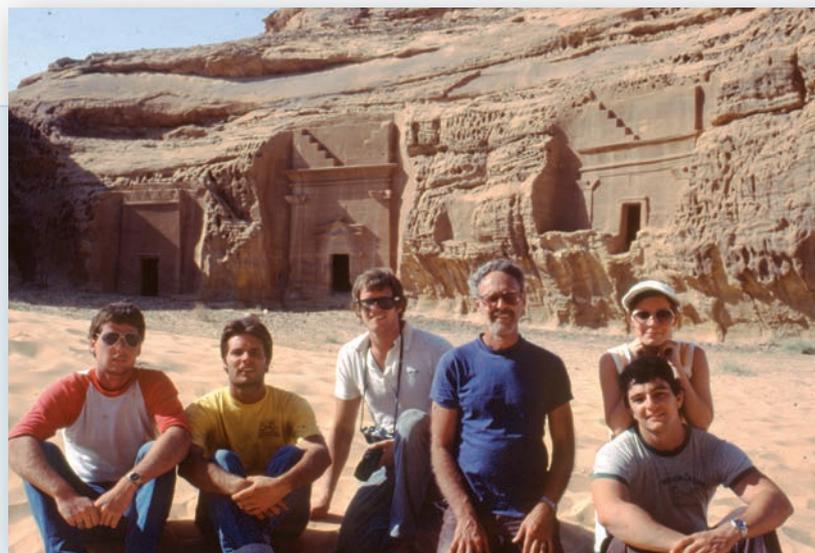
the good fortune to revisit the Dept. of Middle Eastern Studies. I've since decided to donate [the attached] Reg Strange watercolor to the department, in George Cameron's memory.



With my art donation, I would like to include a bit of Reg Strange's story. Is there any bio of him that you can point me to?

Carlene Snyder
Howland
c/o arthur.clark@
aramcoservices.com

NOTE: Reg Strange joined Aramco in 1951, worked in vocational training in Ras Tanura and retired in 1968. He died in 1992 and was survived by his wife, Ruby, and daughter, Dr. Heather Strange.



Scott Pendleton, who worked for the Arab News, sits left, next to Aramcons Chuck Freeny, George Stacy, Bill Tracy, Kamal Amer and Deborah Elliott, at Mada'in Salih in late 1980.

I looked at her picture for a long time, and then remarked to Bill that I thought she was especially lovely. Bill quickly confessed to having had a crush on her. He recalled the time *National Velvet* was shown at Aramco (I'm not sure if in Dhahran or Ras Tanura). Bill watched the movie seated next to Louise. He felt like Elizabeth Taylor had come down from the screen and was right next to him!

...Bill knew Louise for many years, knew where life took her, and that she had passed on at a relatively young age. As for me, who didn't know her at all, I still think of her as the charming girl on the hyena hunt!

Scott Pendleton
sp@isystant.com

Hyena-Hunt Photo Catches Eye

November 19, 2018

As soon as I saw the hyena photos ["Boys' Recall Remarkable Hyena Hunt," Fall 2018], I remembered sitting with Bill Tracy as he showed me those photos and told the story.

In particular, I remember being struck by how very pretty Louise Snyder looks in the group photo. The fact that she was dressed just like any girl of the era would be, yet was standing in the desert with a captured hyena, magnified the impression.

Louise Snyder stands right, next to Bill Tracy and her brother, Miles, in this 1949 hyena-hunt photo.



Fellow Aviator Replies

December 6, 2018

I joined Aramco in 1971 and stayed three years, a time which spanned the 1973 war. I flew most of the fleet including the Twin Otter, B200, DC-3 and F-27.

Chris Lund's father [fellow Aramco pilot Christian Lund] did all of my check rides and I still have the temporary FAA airman's certificates he issued.

After Aramco I flew for Gulf Air in Bahrain and am still married to one of their cabin crew who I met in Oman. From 1979 onwards I flew Boeing 737s

and 767s for Britannia Airways out of London until retirement.

I last saw Chris Sr. in London after he'd retired...sometime in the early '80s.

My novel *The Orphan Sniper* by J. M. Trotter is published on Amazon. It's historical fiction and rather dark.

Mel Trotter
meljtrotter@aol.com

NOTE: The writer got in touch after Chris Lund sent him a letter from the Fall 2018 issue in which Vic Hopkins discussed flying with longtime Aramco pilot Christian Lund.

Recalling "Sweet" Margaret Jepson

January 18, 2019

I would like to tell a little story about late Margaret Jepson ("In Memoriam," Fall 2018).



Margaret Jepson

In 1981, Margaret visited Delhi with a British lady supervisor to recruit for the Steno Pool. The tests of English and typing were organized in Hotel Taj. Margaret played a crucial role.

I remember that about 75 candidates appeared in these tests and out of these about 18 candidates were declared successful on the same day. I was one of the lucky persons.

When I joined the Steno Pool in the first week of October 1981 I found Margaret in our department with Jane Perry. She was a good lady like Jane Perry. Her behavior and way of talking were sweet.

Shahid Husain
hushainshahid@rediffmail.com

Academic Seeks Community Info

January 21, 2019

I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania's Dept. of Architecture, where I am working on my dissertation about early American architecture in the Middle East. I am interested in company towns, and Aramco specifically.

My research examines how the architecture of company towns became a model for modernization outside these towns. I am currently researching how decisions were made about which types of homes were designed, how furniture was chosen and how the layout of the town worked. In addition, I am very much interested in understanding the lived experiences of these towns.

I am looking for photographs, letters, notes, pamphlets, etc., that would help me understand this and write my dissertation. I would also be humbled if there is anyone who would be willing let me interview them about their experiences in Aramco in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s.

Dalal Alsayer
dalsayer@upenn.edu

Remember Me?

February 25, 2019

Remember me? I'm happily retired in Colchester, Essex, since 2002, but still kicking and scratching.

Perhaps you can help. Some years ago when *Alaela* [Aramco Overseas Company's former magazine for retirees] was first published I contributed "Abha and Roses." I'm now writing up bits and pieces from my time in Saudi and when I looked for the magazine, it had gone—probably in a house move.

Would it be possible to dig out an archive copy of the magazine itself and post it to me? As much as I enjoy *al-Ayyam al-Jamiliyah*, I'd dearly love to have a complete copy of *Alaela* with my article in it. I am now a second-year undergrad studying for a BA in Creative Writing at the University of Essex.

Ann Berry
hedgethorne68@yahoo.co.uk

NOTE: Ann sent along a photo of her "Mother of All Girls' Nights," April 1, 2002, celebrating her departure from Saudi Aramco, where she worked in Public Affairs and the Steno Pool.

Front row, from left: Marg Dyer, Glenda Dobinson, Lyndsay Poynton, Andrea Green, Viv Harrison-McGuire. Seated: Ann Berry, Libby Bowers, Jean Rumbelow-Nawwaz, Angela Mundy, Elaine Dunn, Julie Smith-Lewis. Row 2: Chris Wilson, Sue Lawford, Davina Highly, Helen Paterson, Carole Hallett-Ross. Row 3: Maggie Wright, Trus Groneman, Janet Northrup-Gibson, Jackie Driver, Carole Monkhouse, Sue Greenwood, Karrie & Jane Thompson, Jude Fulla, Carole Johnson, Sue Sharman, Jenny Bayton, Pam Robinson-Vizor, Chris Brechenmacher. Back row: Sue Orchard, Pat Barret, Tracy White, Berni Wright.



Photographers Win New Honors

Former company photographers Adrian Waine and Shaikh Amin earned prestigious new awards late last year, adding to their list of honors.

Waine, who worked for Aramco from 1988-95, won first prize in the Engineering Employer's Federation (EEF) photo contest in Britain in November for "Not Painting by Numbers," shot at a DuPont steel plant in Dalton, North Yorkshire. The theme for the competition was "Celebrating Everyday Manufacturing," and Waine won in the Professional Manufacturing Process category.

He received the award in the Houses of Parliament in London.

Waine, who won the EEF "Best Professional Photographer" award in 2017 and was runner-up in 2016, said he developed the skills and confidence to work on large-scale jobs by shooting for the Photo Unit in Dhahran. "Everything was big at Saudi Aramco," he said.

The Dalton plant processes up to 1,000 tons of steel per week. Waine said he picked out the piece he wanted to photograph ("it looked a big tin opener") and then did a delicate dance with the DuPont painter to make the prizewinning picture.

Amin, who retired as chief photographer in 1985, received an award from Photographic Society of America (PSA) President Elena McTighe for attending 25 consecutive annual PSA meetings. The ceremony took place at the PSA meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, in October.

"I am certain that I am the only PSA member from abroad, and from a country as far away as Pakistan, to attend the conference for so many consecutive years," Amin said. "I am honored that my long-time commitment to PSA and, by God's

Shaikh Amin received an award for attending 25 consecutive annual Photographic Society of America meetings from PSA President Elena McTighe in October.



Adrian Waine took first prize in a top U.K. industrial photo competition in November with this shot of a painter working at a Dupont steel-fabrication plant in Dalton, North Yorkshire.

grace, my immense love for my profession has won me this prestigious award."

Amin joined Aramco in 1948 and began his photographic career at the company in 1965. He retired in 1985, but returned on special assignments for a decade after that.

He has won nearly 70 gold, silver and bronze medals in a variety of international exhibitions and three awards from the United Nations.

PSA has members in more than 80 countries. Amin has been a member for 52 years and has been the PSA International representative in Pakistan since 1995.



Cunha Awarded for 'Mission to Mars' STEM Work

Naveen Cunha, the son of retired *Arabian Sun* Editor Paul Cunha and the late Margaret Cunha, received the 2019 Teacher Excellence Award from the International Technology and Engineering Educators Association (ITEEA) in March for his work at the Steven F. Austin Middle School in Bryan, Texas.

Cunha won the award for spearheading the school's Odyssey Program, "an advanced-academics science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) project that provides an interdisciplinary, technology-rich environment allowing students to follow the 'Mission to Mars' theme throughout their three years in the



program," the Bryan Independent School District reported. He received the award at the ITEEA Conference in Kansas City.

"I was extremely honored to receive this award," Cunha said. "As the coordinator of the STEM academy in our district, and robotics and engineering instructor, I feel very privileged to be working and learning with all these amazing educators. This network is strong and supports STEM teachers around the world."

The Odyssey Program won the ITEEA Program Excellence Award in 2018.

Naveen Cunha helps students work on the challenge of directing LEGO robots to traverse Mars to capture a probe.

Retiree's Son Weds in Hyderabad Ceremony

Zubair Mohammed Iftexhar, the son of Ras Tanura Refinery Maintenance Dept. retiree Mohammed Iftexharuddin and Akbari Begum, married Salwah Rahman last year in Nampally, Hyderabad, India.

"In traditional Indian Muslim marriages, there are two events: wedding and reception," the groom wrote. "The wedding day is taken care by the bride's family, while the reception is organized by the groom."

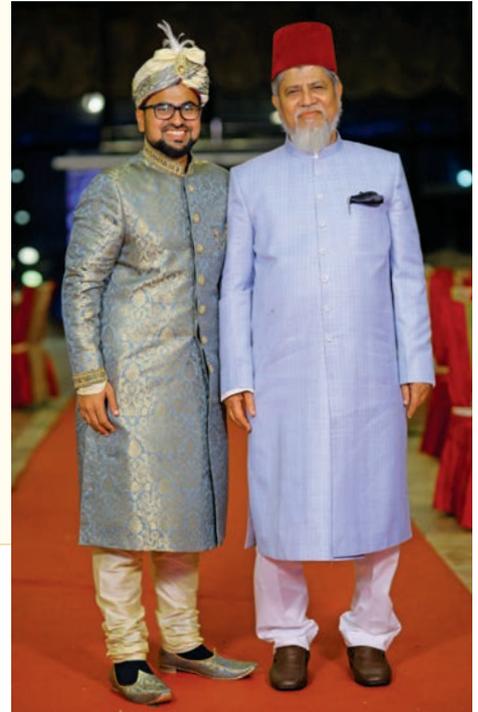
More than 800 guests attended the wedding Aug. 17.

The reception with more than 600

guests, including Iftexhar's friends and roommates from the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he earned an MS degree in computer engineering in 2016, took place the next day.

Iftexhar opened Razorfish Swim University in Hyderabad in 2016 to help in "raising awareness about the importance of swimming as a skill due to the high number of drowning deaths in India," he said.

Zubair Mohammed Iftexhar poses with his father, retiree Mohammed Iftexharuddin, at his nuptial festivities in Hyderabad, India.



Brodie Earns New Swimming Accolade

By Cornell Seymour

Abqaiq swimming standout Layne Brodie, the daughter of retiree Hall Brodie and the late Brenda Brodie, notched a place in the Athletic Hall of Fame at Westminster School in Atlanta last fall. She graduated from Westminster in 2008.

As a five-year-old in Abqaiq in the mid-'80s she was admittedly afraid of the water, but her parents encouraged her to overcome her fear and her coaches, Dan Pratt and Kevin Baxter, taught her the basic strokes. She excelled as a member of the Abqaiq Stingrays, and in 1988 achieved Amateur Athletic Union time standards in 10 events for seven- and eight-year-olds.

The Brodies moved to Atlanta in that year and she and her brother, Kyle, enrolled at Westminster, where she led the swimming team to Georgia High School

Assn. (GHSA) championships in 2005 and 2006. She was six-time GHSA state champion, winning the 100-yard breaststroke four straight years, and earning All-American honors 10 times from the National Interscholastic Coaches Assn.

Her 100-yard breaststroke time of 1:02.12 is still the state record and her 200-yard individual medley time of 2:01.31 remains a school record.

At the University of North Carolina (UNC) she won Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) Swimming Freshman of the Year honors in 2009. She held 10 UNC records and was named most-valuable swimmer twice. She was five-time ACC relay champion, four-time individual champion and held records in the 100- and 200-yard breaststroke.

She was inducted into UNC's Swimming and Diving Champions Circle Hall of Fame in 2016. A solutions engineer for Salesforce in Chicago today, she and continues to swim, "not for competition, just exercise," says her father.

Looking back: Westminster School Hall of Fame honoree Layne Brodie, left, posed with Abqaiq Stingray teammates Sarah Chan, Michelle Karbach and Sarah Rentz at the All Aramco Swim Meet in Dhahran in the spring of 1998.



SAEEA Holds 20th Gathering

The Saudi Aramco Ex-Employees Association (SAEEA) held its 20th get-together Jan. 5 at the Arena Club in central Karachi. The strong turnout of 180 included three new members: Syed Khalid Hussain (visiting from the U.S.), Naiyer Nawaid Hashmi and Mohammed Neyaz Khan. SAEEA President Kamal Farooqi announced the establishment of *Halqa e Shero Adeb* (Forum for Urdu Poetry and Literature) by SAEEA member Syed Shabbar Hasan Abida.

SAEEA officers are (l-r): Arif Qamar, Kamal Farooqi, Muhammad Hamid, Ghulam Khan, Iqbal Khan, Shafiq Khan and Mohammad Abdul Matin.



Season's Greetings



'Bedouin Badgers' ENLIVEN AUSTIN PARTY

A happy contingent of “Bedouin Badgers” enlivened the Aramco Annuitants Christmas Party, hosted by David and Vicki Jessich in Austin, Texas, on Dec. 10.

“It’s a great time to see old friends,” said David, who welcomed 77 attendees to the gaily decorated Austin Club, not far from the capitol.

Badgers Jack and Ellen Meyer and Marge Johansson, all University of Wisconsin graduates, picked up from where they’d left off at gatherings of their group at Aramco. The association, which started

“Bedouin Badgers” Ellen and Jack Meyer, and Marge Johansson, far left, made merry in Austin, along with (clockwise): Bill and Judy Walker, Seth Sharr, and Martha and Fred Goff; Judy Walker and Lucy Templer; and Lisa Rich Hunter and Torr Dell’Oro.

up the 1970s and grew to 30 members, was “the only official University of Wisconsin alumni group outside the U.S.,” Johansson said.

Johansson met her late husband, Folke, in the minerology lab at the university in 1954, and the Meyers graduated from the university in the 1960s.

David recognized Marty Powers, 96, as the senior guest. She arrived in Dhahran in 1953 to join her late husband, Brock. Lucy

Templer, 92, was runnerup. She joined Aramco in Dhahran in 1955 and met her late husband, Jim, there soon after that.

Martin Foster and Ike Bellaci were the “most-recent” retirees at the event. Both retired in May. Slater Wolf (DH06), the son of retiree John Wolf, was the youngest guest.

“Thank you for coming, and spread the word,” said David after a delicious dinner and distribution of door prizes. “We always like to have a good time!”

FIFTY-FOUR ATTEND *Houston Fête*

Fifty-four guests turned out for the Houston-Area Saudi Aramco/ASC Retirees Holiday Luncheon, hosted by Bill and Mary Smart at the BraeBurn Country Club in Houston on Dec. 11.

Bill announced that Verne Stueber, who attended with his daughter, Kathy Green, and granddaughter, Rachel, was retiring as the group's head co-secretary. "After leading us for a remarkable 30 years, Verne has decided to step down," Bill said. "All of us are witnesses to a record that will never be duplicated."

Bill paid tribute group members who had passed away in 2018: Janet Upole, Chuck Walters, Frank Pietrowski, Mike Ameen and Shirley Workman.

He called Ameen "a great storyteller," and Stan McGinley, who retired as Aramco's general counsel in 2010, remembered Ameen as the man who had helped land him a job in Dhahran in 1971.

McGinley said he and his wife, Peggy, were based in Italy where he was an Army major, Judge Advocate General Corps, when he had a job interview with Aramco



in Beirut. He was offered a position—but in New York, not in Dhahran where he wanted to work—because the company could only hire directly from its subsidiaries.

McGinley was about to look elsewhere for work when Ameen, Aramco's Government Relations representative in Riyadh, heard about the situation. He went straight to the top, to Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Ahmed Zaki Yamani, and got his green light "to direct hire to Dhahran, where I stayed for 40 years,"

Houston-Area Saudi Aramco/ASC Retirees Group members posed by the Christmas tree. Seated center is Verne Stueber, who retired as head co-secretary after 30 years as the group's leader. He is flanked right by his daughter, Kathy Green, and left by his granddaughter, Rachel.

said McGinley.

Bill also thanked members who had hosted monthly luncheons during the year: Sally Johnson; Freddie Wong; Mike and Linda Sawran; Neil Fahmy and Verne Stueber; Markie Howell and Najwa Hajjar; and the McGinleys.

Swinging Singles REMEMBER ARAMCO DAYS

The 1950s Dhahran Swinging Singles held their annual mini-reunion Jan. 6 at the Lafayette Park Hotel in Lafayette, Calif. Carol Keyes Rader reprised her role as the host for fellow former singles Ken and Ruth Wright and Fran Grant, and Brats Doug Grant and Jennifer Rader.

"Everyone enjoyed swapping stories over brunch, remembering the old days and old friends," said Ken Wright, who joined the Construction Dept. in the early '50s as a new University of Wisconsin graduate. He recalled that his supervisor, Carl Renfer, helped him and other young engineers like Verne Stueber, Jake Eddy and Theo DeVries jumpstart their careers through the Professional Development Program.

Ruth Wright remembered that one of her favorite experiences as Industrial Relations Dept. librarian was learning about al-Hasa Oasis through the anthropological survey that Rick Vidal was undertaking. She said its springs, canals and date-palm orchards created a special micro-environment that she would never forget.

She and Ken have Vidal's 1955 book, *The Oasis of al-Hasa*, in their library and it "still evokes good memories of the Hofuf area," she said.

"The attendees agreed that Aramco was



Dhahran '50s "Singles" Carol Keyes Rader, Fran Grant, Ruth Wright (second-to-fourth from left) and Ken Wright (right) celebrated in California, along with Brats Doug Grant and Jennifer Rader (center right), and Jennifer's husband, Klaus Kutz, far left.

a great place for young professionals to work and that Saudi Arabia was a great place to live because of its rich culture and friendly people," Ken Wright said.

SAUDI ARAMCO COMMEMORATES

75 Years

OF SCHOOLING IN COMPANY COMMUNITIES

BY ARTHUR CLARK

Students are "larnin' readin', 'ritin' and 'rithmetic, and some Arabic."

The Dust Rag, October 7, 1945



Saudi Aramco kicked off a celebration of 75 years of schooling for children in company communities

March 24, rolling out the red carpet at the Dhahran Hills School for more than 500 teachers and school administrators from Dhahran, Ras Tanura, Abqaiq and 'Udhailiyah. The commemoration will continue into 2020.

The 75th-anniversary video, "Honoring the past, Celebrating today and Looking to the future," may be viewed at <http://bit.ly/SAES75>.

In his keynote speech, Abdulaziz Al-Judaimi, senior vice president, Downstream, hearkened back to 1945 when Aramco hired its first U.S.-certified teacher, Sam Whipple, to start a school in Dhahran. Classes began Oct. 1 that year with a single American student—Steve Furman, the son of Commissary chief Steve Furman, Sr., and his wife, Claudine. Today enrollment at the Saudi Aramco Expatriate Schools (SAES) is "over 4,000 students from 70 nations," Al-Judaimi said.

Mike Smith, SAES superintendent, said company schools have "always sought innovative ways to help students to excel, not only on standardized tests, but...also in overall growth and development. SEAS sees its future in preparing children for their own future."

That dovetails with the company's philosophy of "investing in its people" to achieve success, he told *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah*, adding that Saudi Aramco's investment in community schools is "bearing fruit all over the world."

"Think of what's gone on here, going



Dhahran Hills School students (foreground from left) Owen Dille, Beti Law, Sasha Kozak and Gianna Jarlowe present Nabil K. Dabal, executive director of Human Resources, with a photo collage showing pupils involved in the 75th-anniversary video, "Honoring the past, Celebrating today and Looking to the future," as SAES Superintendent Mike Smith, right, and 75th-anniversary program emcees Zahra Kuliev and Danny Kanj, both Dhahran Middle School ninth-graders, look on.

back 75 years," he said. "Students not only lived here, but thrived here."

Smith said SAES teachers and administrators "belong to something greater than themselves...that needs to be seen in a long historical association." That record "is something to be proud of."

He added that schooling today is broader than reading, writing and arithmetic. "The three Rs aren't the whole story," he noted, explaining that "being compassionate and culturally sensitive"

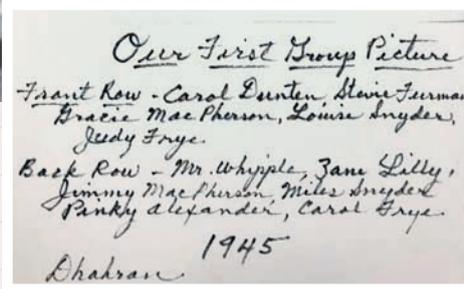
are also critical skills students learn in a multicultural environment.

"Saudi Aramco believes in its people," and good schools not only attract them to the company but keep them there, he said.

Company schooling began in 1940 when as many as 10 children of senior staff in Dhahran began attending a school taught by Edith Chamberlain in the home of Chief Geologist Max Steineke and his wife, Florence. The wife of Ralph Chamberlain, she had arrived that year with the couple's



Sam Whipple, Aramco's first certified schoolteacher, posed with his students in Dhahran in 1945—when the school was in a duplex located where the east wing of the Dhahran Dining Hall was later built. He captioned the photo in his scrapbook.



son, David, and a box of schoolbooks.

The school had been in operation only a few months when, in October, an Italian warplane heading for British-owned oil facilities in Bahrain dropped bombs on Dhahran. By May 1941 all dependent women and children had been evacuated.

In April 1945, as the war in Europe neared its end, Aramco hired Whipple, a recently discharged serviceman, to open the senior-staff school in Dhahran at a wage of "\$250 a month, plus a \$50 hardship bonus," says *Saudi Aramco and Its People: A History of Training*. He arrived in June and, pending the arrival of his first expatriate students, he taught English to Saudi employees.

Whipple faced a "crisis" that September when, just days before the school was to open, he discovered that the textbooks he had ordered had not arrived.

"An appeal by the company newspaper for the return of any schoolbooks that might have been stashed on bookshelves in private homes was not successful," so Whipple "went to Bapco (Bahrain Petroleum Company) in Bahrain ...to beg some books."

Not only did he get the loan of textbooks, but he also imported Bapco's trimester school system. "We felt it would be good because the kids would be in an air-conditioned room during most of the summer and on break during the cooler spring and autumn months," he said.

The senior-staff school opened "in the living room of a duplex house located where the east wing of the main Dhahran Dining Hall was later built." Two days after Furman arrived to start the second grade, "Robin 'Pinkie' Alexander, the red-haired, freckled-faced daughter of the company doctor, T.C.

Alexander, registered as a fifth-grade student. A few days later Carol Dunten became the first kindergarten," says *Saudi Aramco and Its People*.

Furman recalls "knocking on the door on the first day of school" to be greeted by Whipple. The entry in Whipple's diary that day reads: "Today brought forth the opening of the first American Public School in Arabia. Steven Thomas Furman...was the only pupil."

On Oct. 7, Whipple wrote: "Our school

got its first recognition today when Pinkie's and Stevie's names appeared in *The Dust Rag*, the Dhahran paper. This pleased us very much." (Along with "readin', 'ritin' and 'rithmetic," the paper reported, the students were learning "some Arabic.")

"Everybody loved Sam," Furman says. "He was a magnificent person. He took an interest in every child."

Indeed, Furman liked Whipple so much that he hosted him in Houston when he came to address the 1995 Brats Reunion.

Furman also remembers that when he was working in Sierra Leone in the late 1960s he traveled with his family to Casablanca, Morocco, where he met a group of female teachers from Tripoli, Libya. He knew his former teacher had moved there, and "when I asked them if they knew Sam Whipple they jumped up and shouted, 'Yes, he's our principal!'" he recalls.

"Sam had a wonderful reputation with everybody," says Furman.

By the end of 1945 Whipple was

"SAES gave me the infatuation with and confidence to connect with many people from other cultures and nationalities in so many different aspects."

— Annabel Tan, Class of 2016

"Aramco Schools introduced me to different languages and cultures and taught me to be an out of the box thinker. It helped make me an athlete who competed in college and I continue to value daily workouts. It created a network of wonderful Aramco friends."

— Peggy Hunt Rodebush, Class of 1969

This classroom scene in the first company school shows, clockwise from left: Carol Dunten, Miles Snyder, Jimmy MacPherson, Robin "Pinkie" Alexander, Steve Furman and Louise Snyder.



teaching 15 students in Dhahran. He was the school principal, too.

“There were children in all eight grades.... I taught all subjects in all grades,” he said in *Saudi Aramco and Its People*.

Furman recalls that Whipple split up his students by age, not classes, and placed different age groups in “each corner and in the center” of the room.

The first school left a bit to be desired. “It wasn’t set up as a school; it was a house...not user friendly at all,” Furman remembers. “There was no playground equipment. Dhahran was an oil town.”

In the spring of 1946 the school moved into House 1621, next to the bunkhouse where Whipple lived. In September that year workers completed the first purpose-built, two-room schoolhouse in Dhahran. It caught fire shortly before its scheduled opening that month, but fire men saved the outer brick shell and classes began just a month later.

The building later became the front section of the Dhahran Recreation Library.

“About this time, Whipple’s students presented the first school play, a fairytale titled *The Proud Princess*, inviting the entire community to attend a single night’s performance in the recreation hall,” says *Saudi Aramco and Its People*. “Furman played a king and Miles Snyder portrayed an old man. A year later, Miles, the son of Les Snyder, the company’s chief field engineer, became the first graduate of senior-staff schools.”

Snyder recalls graduation as a “big event,” and praises Whipple for his “marvelous sense of humor and gift of teaching people in various age groups.”

Whipple moved to Ras Tanura in the fall of 1946 to open the second senior-staff school. Mary Leonardini, whom he described as a “very pretty Italian lady,” took the reins



Pictured at the Ras Tanura School monkey bars in 1946 are (r-l): Phyllis Leach, Linda McCarthy, Katie Kennedy, Iona Brassfield, Sharon McMillin, Norton Bunyan, Sue Knowles, Myles Jones, Kay Gray (swinging), Marshal Jones, Dale Gray (facing camera) and Mike Ledbetter.

in Dhahran. A second teacher, Jane Seeley, joined her shortly after that.

Among Whipple’s students in Ras Tanura were third-grader Katie Kennedy Dewey and her seventh-grade sister, Molly, the daughters of Gerry and Dolores Kennedy.

“There were 13 kids in all, first through eighth grade,” Dewey recalls. “The eighth-grader was Joyce Butler. We sat at picnic tables at first, with the individual round seats.

“We first met in a part of the old Mess Hall that had been partitioned off for the one-room school. At lunchtime we got lovely aromas from the other side.”

“They let us out early, before the men came in for lunch,” she says, because there was no stoplight on the street outside and no one wanted to risk a mishap.

“We didn’t have playground equipment at first, but we played a lot of ‘work up’ baseball,”

Mike Keller (AB69) views his sixth-grade class (he’s in the front row, in a plaid shirt) in the 1966 *al-Shu’lah* yearbook, during the 2009 Expatriates Reunion. The first school in Abqaiq opened in 1947.

she says. “It took all the kids to fill the bases, pitcher and catcher and still have batters!”

Whipple “could run like the wind,” she says, recalling that he would raise his hands in the air like Julie Andrews in the opening scene of *The Sound of Music*, take the



“Aramco Schools specifically taught me that there is fun in many aspects of life, including academic learning and the value of other cultures different than yours.”

— Tiffany Sumner Boggan,
Class of 1992

“They helped me to love school! Having such amazing teachers changed my attitude towards school. I wanted to give back.”

— Melissa Kraft Norton,
Class of 1984





The entire Ras Tanura student body and faculty members in the new school, 1950

The Ras Tanura student body had grown substantially by 1950. The school moved into a permanent brick structure in 1949.

hand of the first student to reach him “and run. It was hard to keep up.

“Also, he would read aloud the first 15 minutes or so each morning and always stop at the high point of a chapter, so we tried hard not to be late and miss the ongoing saga the next day.”

Jane Dean arrived in December 1946 to share teaching duties at the Ras Tanura School, which by then had moved into a portable building across from the Mess Hall. Dewey remembers Dean as “a wonderful person”

who would draw a cake with colored chalk for each student’s birthday, and then serve it by erasing slices.

In June 1947 Dean, her fiancé and three other people died in a car crash and Whipple taught solo until December when another certified teacher, Helen Jones, arrived to assist. Ras Tanura’s new school was completed in 1949.

A senior-staff school opened in Abqaiq in 1947 in a private home where Josephine Rose taught three students: Valerie Ridgeway, Charlotte Hubner and Norman Gray. In 1948 the school moved to a portable building near the swimming pool. The new school opened in 1953.

The company added the ninth grade to the schools’ curriculum in 1949. Several students who graduated from the eighth grade in 1949 stayed another year and graduated again in 1950.

The ‘Udhailiyah School opened with an enrollment of 95 in 1978 and new schools were built in company communities during the early ‘80s. ‘Udhailiyah family camp closed in 1986 along with its school, but it reopened in 1991.

Small schools had operated in ‘Udhailiyah and elsewhere beginning in the 1950s, and the 1958 Abqaiq School yearbook includes a picture of the ‘Udhailiyah teacher and five children. Schools also functioned at Uthmaniyah, where Howard Copeland taught at all the grades and Mrs. Rosemary Smith taught kindergarten; at Umm ‘Unaiq, a drilling camp about 50 miles southwest of Abqaiq; and at Nariyah, on the eastern end of the Trans-Arabian Pipe Line (Tapline), the only Tapline pump station operated by Aramco.

In September 1983 a total of 3,677 students were enrolled in nine community schools that employed about 600 teachers and staff.

SAES enrollment hit an “all-time high of 4,376 students in 2015,” Al-Judaimi said at the opening of the 75th-anniversary

celebration. That’s a far cry the first class of just one in 1945.

And what happened to Sam Whipple, Aramco’s pioneer certified teacher?

He left the company in 1954, but returned to teach the fourth grade in Dhahran in 1956 and ‘57. In September 1995 he came back to Dhahran as a special guest at the company schools’ 50th anniversary festivities, and he died in 2010.

“The school was the hub of the community,” Whipple said at the anniversary. “I was a friend, a teacher and father confessor to my students, and to some of their parents.”

The teachers who attended the 75th-anniversary kickoff event in Dhahran in March could no doubt recognize their schools and themselves in that description.



“I gained so much confidence at Aramco and a much more sophisticated view of the world.”

— Johnny Rogers, Class of 1974



“The field trips to Hofuf, all the fun activities during intersession breaks, school plays and other productions put on by the students were my best memories from Aramco Schools.”

— Stephanie Manasa, Class of 2008



Sam Whipple returned to Dhahran in 1995 as a special guest to celebrate the company schools’ 50th anniversary.



Celebrate HOMECOMINGS

AT



REUNION

WRITTEN BY ARTHUR CLARK

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARTHUR CLARK, BERT SEAL AND SAM FIELD

If “home is where the heart is,” then the thumping felt in Dhahran and across the kingdom March 11-21 was off the Richter scale. That’s when nearly 550 retirees and family members returned to celebrate the Fourth KSA Expatriates Reunion.

Eighty-five percent of the attendees made their first trip back to the kingdom since departing, some after an absence of several decades.

Two big banquets bookended the get-together: the Welcome Dinner hosted by Saudi Aramco President and CEO Amin Nasser in Dhahran on March 12;

and a “surprise” dinner party hosted by Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources Khalid Al-Falih at al-Diriyah to honor the new ambassador to the U.S., Princess Reema bint Bandar ibn Sultan, on March 20.

The reunion program, titled “Rediscover the Kingdom,” offered 110-plus activities. Even though the reunion ran a record 11 days, that still wasn’t enough time for anyone to pack everything into one itinerary.

*“So much has changed,
but it still feels like home.”*



But some brave attendees still tried, signing up for back-to-back trips beginning as early as 3 a.m. one day and not finishing until 2 a.m. the next.

“Welcome back to Saudi Arabia, to Saudi Aramco and to your home!” Nasser told guests at the dinner March 12, held a stone’s throw from the iconic new King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture.

Nasser thanked Reunion Committee leader Ali Baluchi for guiding not only the 2019 gathering, but also those in 2000, 2009 and 2015, and he applauded the committee members and the volunteers for their hard work.

The CEO recalled that the company had welcomed its first important guests to Dhahran almost exactly 81 years earlier, in March 1938, just days after the discovery of crude oil at Dammam Well No. 7. That group, which had traveled across the kingdom at the invitation of Crown Prince Sa’ud, included Princess Alice of Britain, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria.

“As you can imagine, everyone was rather busy with flow tests on the new well,” Nasser said, but the visitors still got a warm reception from families in Dhahran.

“You are our latest group of very important guests,” he told attendees.

He talked about Saudi Aramco’s current status and its



Top: Lights play on the walls of al-Diriyah, the first Saudi capital, prior to a surprise dinner honoring the kingdom's new ambassador to the U.S., Princess Reema bint Bandar ibn Sultan, on March 20. Far left: Reunion banners flutter in a stiff breeze at the CEO's Welcome Dinner in Dhahran on March 12. Above left: Johnnie Guyon, 95, the oldest reunion participant, visited Qurayyah with her sons, Charles, left, and Steve. Above right: Brenda Trousdell enjoyed a museum in Dammam with her brother, Ken. Left: Anise Ashraf and his wife, Ambreen, pose on the ramparts of al-Diriyah.



with her sister, Jennifer Rader (RT70). “There’s something about the very familiar color of the sky and the dust in the air...”

Their dad, George Rader, arrived in Ras Tanura in 1947 and their mom, Sylvia, joined him in 1950. He worked in pipeline design and retired in 1982, and this was the sisters’ first homecoming in 40 years.

“So much has changed, but it still feels familiar—like home,” said Brenda Trousdell (RT83), who attended with her brother, Ken. “The new energy is great. It’s amazing to see a female newscaster.”

Their parents, Kenneth and Carol Trousdell, lived in Ras Tanura from 1980 to 1998, when he retired as head of Maintenance.

Some visitors discovered old colleagues still at work, or reconnected with them through their children.

“It’s been fabulous,” said George Grover, a geologist who retired in 2011, noting that he’d visited the Exploration and Petroleum Engineering Center in Dhahran “thinking I wouldn’t know anyone” and been surprised when he ran into several former colleagues.

His wife, Martha, a former Dhahran

Left: The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, which opened in 2018, served as a dramatic backdrop for guests arriving for the CEO’s Welcome Dinner. Below: Ali Al-Naimi chats with Ken and Carol Swanson at his “meet-and-greet” luncheon March 14.

work in progress, recognizing the contributions of attendees to the enterprise.

“Today we are the only oil company in the world capable of producing more than 10 million barrels of crude oil per day, something you all helped contribute to,” he said. “By the time we are done Saudi Aramco...will also be a global leader in gas, refining and marketing, in chemicals, in base lube oils and in energy-related technologies....”

“When people ask me today about the source of strength for Saudi Aramco, I always say our generation inherited a great company from previous generations of Aramcons. The biggest challenge going forward is to make sure we follow in your footsteps.”

Nasser also highlighted recent changes in Saudi society, such as “theaters opening up and concerts by top global entertainers...and cars being driven by women.”

His remarks were in line with those of firefighter Jazyah Al-Dossary, the dinner’s emcee.

“I feel special standing here before you as the face of change so dearly dreamed of, back in the day,” Al-Dossary said, adding that she is “proof that the transformation that [King Abdulaziz] envisioned is under way.”

Getting to the heart of the reunion, Al-Dossary quoted Swiss philosopher Pascal Mercier, saying: “We leave something of ourselves behind when we leave a place; we stay there, even though we go away. And there are things in us that we can find again only by going back there.”

That matched what many returnees felt. “There are things inside us we don’t think of,” said Pamela Rader-Pauwels (RT68), who came





Counterclockwise from above: Former CEO Abdallah Jum'ah and Jim Mandaville reconnected at the CEO's Dinner; Asghar Khan and his daughter, Maliha, enter the walkway to the dinner; President and CEO Amin Nasser tells attendees, "Welcome home!"; Ali Baluchi, reunion chief coordinator, gets in the picture with Brats, from left, Libby Jessich, Kristina Owen and Rawan Al-Shuwaikh.

Hills School music teacher who wore a necklace featuring the silver riyal she'd received at her husband's retirement party, shared his feelings.

"It's absolutely amazing!" she said. "We've reconnected with people. We feel like we've come home."

Muhammad Idrees, who attended with his wife, Shaheen, and children Humerah and Junaid, reconnected when he visited Abqaiq and met Joann Jarvis-Olivas (AB91), the daughter of Bob and Doris Jarvis, who was visiting with her husband. Idrees, a 2017 retiree with a 39-year career, told Jarvis-Olivas that her dad was an old North Ghawar Producing Dept. colleague and that he remembered her mother, too.

"I could see the sudden joy on her face because she had met someone who knew her parents so well," he said. "It was also a unique and great moment of excitement for me to see family members of one of my very dear employees."

Baluchi and his deputy, Saeed Al-Ghamdi, the leaders of the 20-person Reunion Committee, understood the depth of those feelings. Both men had Community Services careers spanning more than four decades. Baluchi retired as



BOTTOM: JASSIM ALSHUWAIKH



Ras Tanura School graduate Julia Moench-Parent, left, and her daughter, Jasmine, bargain with a fruit seller at the entrance to Hofuf's suq.

Right, from top: Emily Knowles Newman, right, who returned to the kingdom after a 51-year absence, listens as guide Amel Al-Ramadan discusses an al-Hasa potter's work; Mindy Hopfenbeck soaks up the craftsmanship of the Damascus Room in the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture; reunion guests receive a first-person introduction to the Safeya Binzagr Gallery in Jiddah.

general manager of Community Services in 1993 and Al-Ghamdi retired as manager of Community and Office Services in 2000.

"We greatly cherish and enjoy these opportunities to welcome our overseas friends back to Saudi Arabia and are so grateful to Saudi Aramco for sponsoring another KSA Expatriate reunion," they said in the reunion program.

"We still recall the wonderful years you and your families shared with us, especially in the early development of the kingdom. We are proud to share with you some of the kingdom's recent achievements in return."

"Our objective is to make people happy," said Al-Ghamdi, about halfway through the event. "You should have seen all the hugging on the first day!"

Americans led the attendee list with a turnout of around 400, followed by Canadians, Pakistanis, Indians and Britons, with small contingents from elsewhere in Europe and the Middle East. Two participants hailed from Australia and one came from Trinidad and Tobago.

Retirees and spouses made up about half the participants, Brats and wives more than 40 percent, and grandchildren around six percent.

They had the opportunity not only to meet Nasser and Al-Falih, but also the men who preceded them as CEO—Abdallah Jum'ah at the Welcome Dinner, and Ali Al-Naimi at the first-ever "meet-and-greet" reunion luncheon for a former CEO on March 14.

Fred Blanchard, who began working with Al-Naimi in the early '70s, spoke for the group at the luncheon, saying, "Thanks for allowing all of us to help you on your journey."

"You don't realize what you have done for Saudi Arabia," Al-Naimi told attendees. "You trained us and you trained us well."

"Every one of you, in one way or another, contributed to our education and our development. Today Saudi Aramco is a great enterprise...because of what you, all together, established in the past."

In another reunion "first," Nasser's wife, Rania Moualla, hosted a luncheon for ladies March 13. She discussed her philanthropic journey to establish a culinary institute to train young Saudi chefs so that they could showcase the kingdom's culture "by promoting our local flavors on international platforms."

Meanwhile, attendees with an ear for music or a desire to dance found plenty to do at the Sandstock '19 Festival, featuring musicians from all four company communities, and at a dinner/dance where second-generation Saudi Aramco Hans Stockenberger and his wife, Rachael, sang their hearts out with the dynamic Dhahran Big Band. Stockenberger's parents, Hans and Leova, retired in 2010, and Leova was on hand for the concert.

Former Half Moon Yachting Assn. members lent a





Meral, and her husband, laughed with Julia Moench-Parent (RT89) outside the al-Hasa caves. She came with her brother, Jamie (RT94), and her daughter.

“Our families lived just down the street from each other in Ras Tanura!” said Karan, with a huge smile. During the 1991 Gulf War, he worked around the clock at Tanajib with C.J. Moench, Julia and Jamie’s dad, to prevent oil from Kuwait from entering Tanajib’s water-intake system, he said.

Hai Tran, a helicopter pilot who retired in 2010, embraced Abdulaziz Al-Gerban on a flight to Shaybah after he found out his former first officer was flying the plane. “I was very surprised. I didn’t recognize him with a beard!” said Tran, who attended with his wife, Diana.

Left: Reunion attendees looked back over eight decades of company history in the Archives section of the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture. Below: Reunion volunteer Wafa Khoja and Jama Wilson-Snyder chat in a museum in Hofuf as Fawzia Aloumi Lide looks on. Bottom: Sarah Evans, left, and Andrea Riordan flank Abdulwahab Alghunaim in his museum in Dammam.

hand at the group’s Spring Fling regatta on March 16. “Wow! There’s been a lot of wonderful reconnecting,” said Fraser Brown, a 2015 retiree who served as the Sunfish Fleet captain. “It kind of feels like we didn’t leave,” chipped in his wife, Cathy.

Other popular activities included visits to the Center for World Culture, which opened in 2018 and earned *Time* magazine’s accolade as “one of the world’s 100 greatest places to visit.” There were trips to al-‘Ula and Mada’in Salih in the Northwest, to Riyadh, and to ‘Asir in the Southwest and Jiddah on the Red Sea, as well as to al-Hasa Oasis, Shaybah, Jubail and an inland caviar farm. In addition, there were opportunities to visit museums in Dhahran, Dammam, Hofuf, Abha, Riyadh and al-Diriyah.

Attendees toured al-‘Uqayr, the ancient port for al-Hasa on the Gulf, and then lunched at a beachside diner at the Qurayyah Seawater Treatment Plant. Visitors to Shaybah took a side trip to the nearby Rub’ al-Khali Wildlife Center—and those touring March 15 were as surprised as its population of oryx, ostrich and gazelle when a gentle shower fell in the desert that evening.

The reunion’s homecoming spirit prevailed even for employees who had never been based in Saudi Arabia.

Freddie Wong, who retired from Aramco Services Company in Houston as a senior projects engineer in 2003, stayed with the family of Abdullah Al-Sughayer, whom he’d met on an assignment in New York many years before.

“See the minaret and the blue dome? His house is right next that,” said Wong, pointing across the eight-lane highway dividing the original Dhahran from the Dhahran that’s grown up adjacent to al-Khobar. The majority of attendees stayed in this “new” Dhahran, in a cluster of three big-name hotels that weren’t even built when the previous reunion took place four years earlier.

“It’s a special relationship—a personal connection that is kind of unique,” Wong said of his 25-year friendship with Al-Sughayer. “His boys fought to see who would pick me up at the airport!”

There were serendipitous mini-reunions among returnees, too. Ned Karan, who attended with his wife, Carole, their daughter,



“It’s a special relationship. His boys fought to see who would pick me up at the airport!”

Al-Gerban was happy to see his old mentor. “He was a great boss. I learned a lot of lessons from him in the cockpit and in my life,” he said.

Back in the passenger section, Public Relations Dept. retiree Jassim Al-Showaikh, a reunion volunteer, was equally surprised to meet Saman Khan (DH00), who had worked as an intern at *The Arabian Sun* in 2008. She attended with her sisters, Saira (DH98) and Marian (DH05), and their parents, Sanaul and Farhana Khan. He retired in 2016.

Sometimes reunion smiles turned to tears. Sarah Evans (DH90), the daughter of Paul and Susan Thompson, apologized for crying on a visit to a museum in Dammam that held everything from a *kiswah* from the Ka’bah in Makkah to a 1959 Cadillac once owned by King Sa’ud. “Making this trip is a dream come true,” she said, just before tearing up. Her dad, an ophthalmologist, retired in 2003.

Museum-owner Abdulwahab S.

Alghunaim said he was happy to host reunion visitors, even if they wept.

“They have been in Saudi Arabia before,” he said. “Now they are back home. It’s good to give them some memories on a trip through the past.”

Reunion attendees ranged in age from Johnnie Guyon, 95, to 15-year-old Julia Beard, the daughter of Ilaria and Daniel Beard. She came from Italy with her mom and her sister, Lucrezia. Her dad retired from the Environmental Protection Dept. in 2017.

Guyon attended with her sons, Charles (AB62) and Steve (AB65). Her husband, Raymond, a driller whom everyone called “Tex,” arrived in 1947. She joined him in 1949 and the family stayed until 1968, living in or near Abqaiq.

Along with long-distance flights and local bus rides, attendees enjoyed learning traditional dance steps from troupes wielding sticks, swords and big hand drums at several venues.

“I’m just blown away by the whole reunion,” said Ned Waite, tipping his



Top: Posing at Shaybah are (center) Mir Abbas Sagheer and his wife, Zakia Khanum; their children Fiza and Nihad, right; and Fiza’s husband, Humayun Khan, left. Above: Relaxing in Dhahran are Karen Shepard (center), her son, Bob, and his wife, Sharon, and their daughters, Carlee, left center, and Elizabeth, right center.

Mounirah Al-Ashgar leads guests into her “museum home” at al-Rabiyah in Dhahran.



hat to the organizers. “Not only are they doing it first class, but they are doing it first class in the first-class section.”

Waite, who retired from Purchasing and Procurement in 2010, stayed in Dhahran with his daughter, Amy (DH95), and her family. He said the “warmth and knowledge” of the male and female Saudi tour guides he’d met had been outstanding.

“They want to show off the kingdom’s culture,” he said. “There hasn’t been a moment that I haven’t been impressed.”

The guides held spirited conversations with their charges. Amel Al-Ramadan, a teacher whose husband had just retired from Saudi Aramco, talked about growing up in al-Hasa and recent changes in the kingdom during a bus tour of the oasis.

“I thought my granddaughters would drive, but thanks to the king we do that!” said Al-Ramadan, who has her license and helps women learn to drive



Happy visitors to the Jabal al-Qarah caves in al-Hasa found a small museum, shops and paved walkways among many changes from trips in the past.





in her spare time. “I tell them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Go!’” she said.

The reunion was a big family affair for many.

The nine-member crew of Karen Shepard and her late husband, Lee, was the largest family contingent. Shepard, who pioneered home economics at the Abqaiq School, came with her daughter, Nancy Wyatt (DH78), her husband, Craig, and their two daughters, and her son, Bob (DH80), his wife, Sharon, and their two daughters.

The Shepards arrived in 1974, lived in Abqaiq, ‘Udhailiyah, Dhahran, Ras Tanura and Buraydah, and retired in 1995. “I can’t believe how excited our children are to see what their dad and grandfather loved and told so many stories about,” said Bob.

Three daughters of Don and Peggy Armstrong, Diane (DH58), Lori (DH68) and Rebecca (AB72), also linked up for the reunion. Lori, who came with her husband, Larry Peabody, calculated that the sisters, their parents and their brother, Chuck, had spent a whopping 177 years in the kingdom.

Larry, who called himself a “Brat-in-law,” was visiting the kingdom for the first time. “I love it. I’m having a great time,” he said.

Don Armstrong joined the Exploration Dept. in Dhahran in 1947 and Peggy came three years later with Diane and Chuck in tow. They initially moved into the home of Krug Henry, a pioneer company geologist, who was on “long leave” with his family, Diane said. Don retired in 1972, but Chuck carried on in the Drilling and Workover Services Dept.

Amir Sa’ud ibn Naif Al Sa’ud, the governor of the Eastern Province, praised Saudi Aramco, its retirees and their families when a group met him in Dammam on March 19.

“Saudi Aramco has always played a pivotal role in the modern development of both the kingdom and our cherished region,” he said in the program. “The contribution that you and your families made...can never be overestimated, and we extend our ongoing appreciation and



Top: Jiddah visitors stopped at Bayt Nassif, built in the mid-19th century. Its famous neem tree is said to have once been the only tree in the city. Left: Alexandra Cornwall, who departed the kingdom as a two-year-old in 1986, leads visitors down the steps in the Jabal al-Qarah caves in al-Hasa; her parents, Steve and Deborah, are back left.



Retiree Mark Lowey had fun joining in a traditional dance in 'Asir, in the kingdom's Southwest. "At first, I was reluctant and tried to hide behind someone so as not to be selected as the next dancer, but the dancing was a blast," he said. "I felt at home out there."



Top left: Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources Khalid Al-Falih and the new ambassador to the U.S., Princess Reema bint Bandar ibn Sultan, shown gesturing to his right, enjoyed mingling with reunion attendees after a dinner in her honor at al-Diriyah. Guests dined beneath the walls of 18th- and early 19th-century Saudi capital. *Left:* Attendees Gerd-Inger and Mark McDougall chat with Debbie Lumpa, right, a reunion volunteer.

gratitude for the many sacrifices you made in leaving your countries to help further the growth of ours.

“As we open our hearts and hands to you, we will pray you will be enriched by your time among us and leave with stronger connections than ever before.”

Those ties were reaffirmed March 20 when about 70 mainly American attendees flew to Riyadh at the invitation of Khalid Al-Falih to attend a specially added dinner for Princess Reema bint Bandar, the kingdom’s new envoy to





Visitors to Mada'in Salih in the kingdom's Northwest expressed their feelings about the reunion in front of one of the site's Nabataean tombs.

the U.S. Fittingly, it took place at al-Diriyah, the ancestral home of the Al Sa'ud.

After a dazzling sound-and-light show projected on the walls of the first Saudi capital, Princess Reema spoke warmly about growing up in America, where her father was ambassador from 1983 to 2005. The new diplomat, who was mobbed like a rock star when she posed later for photos, said she wanted to change Americans' perceptions of the kingdom.

"If I can do one thing [as ambassador], I hope to show the rest of America what you know to be true: That we are more than oil; we're more than business; we're people who want good from others and we hope others will want good for us," she said. "I hope you will all be ambassadors with me for my nation, as I hope to be, for both sides."

Al-Falih reiterated that point, adding that, although he had a new title, he was proud to be called "an Aramcon."

"Tonight, I have many gifts to thank God for, and one of them is having you all here as my guests in this wonderful location," he said. "Saudi Arabia was your home for many, many decades, some of you retired and some of you

Engaging and energetic guides like these young ladies at al-Diriyah, near Riyadh, offered insights into the kingdom's heritage and a look to its future, too.

"I hope you will all be ambassadors for my nation, as I hope to be, for both sides."

second-generation."

A modern, new Saudi Arabia "is unfolding before our very eyes" in line with the country's "Vision 2030" development plan, he said. "The kingdom

today is about making the impossible possible. It's breathtaking and I hope you have been able to sample some of this."

He lauded the links between

Saudi Arabia and retirees and their families. The 2019 reunion was one more indicator of how generations of Aramcons and Saudis "stay connected despite changing conditions," he said.



The Hole in My Heart is *Healed*

WRITTEN AND
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
Jenn Harbert



“

“You can’t go home again,” they say. But here I was, sitting on the back step of my old home in Abqaiq, tears rolling down my face.

I almost didn’t get there. But when my old friend JAMA Wilson-Snyder (AB76) found me on Facebook and said she planned to attend the 2019 KSA Expatriates Reunion with my classmate, Yolanda Mathey (AB75), that tipped the balance: I’d go, and share a room with them.

We arrived very late March 11 at King Fahd International Airport in Dammam and drove to our hotel in the dark. The next morning when I looked out the window, I couldn’t believe my eyes!

Where I remembered sand, palm trees and empty vistas from 40-plus years before, there were buildings, highways and cars. No desert to be seen!

I found Ted Sketo (DH71) and his wife, Helaine, in the lobby. Ted had hailed an Uber so Helaine could find the perfect *abaya* at a mall.

I joined them, not quite believing I was

Opposite: Al-Khobar has expanded beyond recognition in in the last 40 years, growth that’s brought many chandeliers in its wake. The main photo, taken from atop the author’s hotel, shows the far-western end of old Pepsi Cola Road, just over the top of the car dealership, bottom right. *Clockwise from right:* The author enjoyed camel companionship at Geraiyan Al-Hajri’s farm; took time out for waffles at the Dhahran Dining Hall with pals, clockwise from left: Amie Dodds Power and Roger Power, Barbara Deines Martin, Yolanda Mathey and Glen Power; and they all nearly blew away at Qurayyah Beach.

headed to a mall. I should be going to a *sug!* Times had certainly changed.

At first, the mall seemed like any one of its sisters in the U.S., except for clothing representing another culture. But then I saw the chandeliers. As the reunion continued I found them everywhere, even in pizza joints.

That night we attended the CEO’s Welcome Dinner in a huge tent erected especially for attendees near the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture. What a welcome!

The next day I boarded a bus bound for a farm outside al-Mubarraz, near Abqaiq. Back in a sandy environment, I felt more at home!

The red-carpet welcome we received from the farm owner, retiree Geraiyan Al-Hajri, and his family moved many of us to tears.

Geraiyan, a longtime Wellsites Inspection Unit employee, is famous for his ability to navigate in the desert, finding landmarks where any layman would be lost.

His farm featured date trees, camels to ride, a falcon to touch, even a swimming pool and fountains, surrounded by miles and miles of dunes. We had a wonderful lunch, and then Geraiyan arranged an outing in four-wheel-drive vehicles.

The joy of riding on sand like in my





Old-fashioned stores in the heart of al-Khobar, where perfume shops compete with the sundry smells of the city, offered a nostalgic counterpoint to malls.

youth was indescribable.

The next day, March 14, Jama, Yolanda and I breathlessly awaited our return to Abqaiq. After a stop in 'Udhailyah, we were finally going home!

Abqaiq was huge compared to the '70s. The school had grown, but the part I remembered so well was still in use.

Our beloved gym was the same, except for fresher paint and flooring; its stage and office were intact. And the classrooms where my stepmom, Marjorie, taught elementary students were also unchanged.

And, oh no, the home-economics classroom looked untouched! An unabashed tomboy, I had pleaded to take industrial arts, but home economics was mandatory.

I'm sure I made our teacher, Karen Shepard, miserable. After all, I remembered dumping my entire box of pins on the floor and taking the entire class period to pick them up, all to avoid sewing a stitch.

To make those memories worse, I discovered Mrs. Shepard was on the trip with us! She graciously said she didn't remember me being a problem. But the year after I took the class, the school opened industrial arts to girls.

So I blazed a trail for others. I guess that's a good thing.

After seeing the school we went to the Clubhouse, part of which was under reconstruction. The area that was the Date Pit is now a Fuddrucker's. The original pool is now the lady's pool and the entire area is walled for privacy.

This was only a street away from my old house, 16-272, so I cut loose from the group

and ran to see it.

Walls stood where box hedges with sweet-tasting flowers grew during my childhood. The concrete patio in back was now the foundation for a shed, and a side patio had been installed. Stucco siding had been attached to the cinderblock walls. A back room had been added, making the yard quite small.

I sat on the back step and closed my eyes. In my mind's eye I saw my dad, John, coming home from work through the back gate, and I heard Saeed calling me in to dinner.

When I opened my eyes I realized I was crying. My departure 42 years ago felt just a heartbeat away. Now, the home was empty. I wondered what families had followed us, and if they had been as happy as we were. I truly hope so.

Jama, Yolanda and I enjoyed spending time with other Abqaiq Brats, like Roger and Glen Power (AB70 and DH76). Roger got married last September and this trip was the honeymoon for him and his wife, Amie, whose humor and spirit quickly earned her a place on the honorary Brat list!

Glen rented an SUV for for a desert excursion, but a *shamal* kept us closer to Abqaiq than originally planned. We stopped at the old "halfway house," abandoned even when we were kids. We remembered that Don Crawley (AB67) had been born there, halfway between Abqaiq and Dhahran.

Closer to Abqaiq, we were able to find the old salt mine and scooped up small bags of coarse salt to take home.

Later that week I was among a group invited to Ali and Amira Baluchi's home in al-Khobar. It was filled with beauty, including chandeliers, good food and great company. My parents used to invite Ali over for dinner at our home in Abqaiq, and he remembered those good times!

On March 19 I traveled to al-Hasa with another group, eager to see the oasis's timeless caves. I couldn't believe how much they have been developed!

What was a canyon and cave system was now a tourist zone, with shops, museums, placards, a photographer and concrete floors in the caves. The potter's caves are still in the area, and the same family operates them. I bought a pot resembling one my

mom purchased there, and it now sits next to hers in a display that serves as a "Saudi Museum" in my home.

Other reunion trips took us to fabric, food, spice and gold *sugs* in Dammam and al-Khobar. We photographed dhows, stirring memories of Gulf trips long ago.

The spice markets retained their same uplifting fragrance. Somehow, scent can transport a person home in an instant, so I bought a tub of frankincense resin to smell whenever I want the real thing.

Reunion branding was all about "Re-discovering the Kingdom." Indeed.

We Brats often talk about how gutted we felt when we had to leave Saudi Arabia at the time our fathers retired. Some of us were born in the kingdom, but couldn't go home again. And some have gone back as second- or third-generation Aramcons, or to work for other companies.

I believe I'm the only Brat who arrived due to a court decision. My dad and stepmom gained custody of me when I was seven. Wild and mentally torn apart when I arrived, Saudi Arabia and the love of a close community healed me.

But I felt broken all over again when Dad suddenly decided to retire in 1977. I was a senior in high school then, and didn't get to come home to say goodbye.

Now I've done that. The hole in my heart is healed. Thank you, Saudi Aramco!

The patio has disappeared under a shed and an addition has shrunk the front yard, but returning to House 16-272 in Abqaiq enabled the author finally to say "goodbye"—lifting the weight of what she'd been missing for 42 years.





IT'S 'PIKES PEAK OR BUST'

for

2020

ANNUITANTS REUNION



Annuitants Reunion 2020 cohosts John Palmer and Doreen Cumberford (far left), and Doug and Elizabeth Cook, say attendees can look forward to lovely autumn colors at the 32nd biannual *half* in Colorado Springs, Colo.

The 32nd Annuitants Reunion will be held Sept. 26-30, 2020, at the Cheyenne Mountain Resort (www.cheyennemountain.com) in Colorado Springs, Colo., and hosts John Palmer and Doreen Cumberford, and Doug and Elizabeth Cook, hope participants will arrive early and stay late. “We are excited that the reunion will occur close to the peak of the beautiful aspen color season in one of the best tourism cities in the U.S.,” they say.

The venue is a four-star hotel operated by Dolce Resorts, Wyndham’s premium brand, in the foothills below 14,000-foot Pikes Peak. It has a Pete Dye-designed golf course, a 35-acre lake for boating, a spa, 17 tennis courts, pickle-ball courts, indoor and outdoor swimming, and a four-star restaurant.

The Colorado Springs area offers a wide array of activities and places to visit, including Pikes Peak, Garden of the Gods, the Air Force Academy, the Royal Gorge (the highest bridge in North

America) and an “Old West” town of Cripple Creek. Other attractions are the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Manitou Springs, Cave of the Winds and Manitou Cliff Dwellings.

“Within an easy day trip, you will also find some of the most breathtaking fall-color views in the country,” say the hosts, who are planning several group tours. “You will want to come early and stay late to get the best of the reunion and the tourist activities of the area.

“The only challenge for attendees will be choosing which ways to enjoy their time with old friends. Space will be limited to about 300 participants, so keep your eye out for the registration announcements.”

Detailed information about the event will be published in the next issue of *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah* and on AramcoExpats.com, and reservations may be made starting in October.

John worked for Project Management from 1993 to 2014 and was in Saudi Arabia from 1995 to 2010. He and Doreen raised their daughter, Lynsey, in Dhahran.

John lives in Denver, where he is an active pickle-ball player, Toastmaster and biker. Doreen is a certified life coach and intercultural coach who plans to publish a book about living abroad (*Life in the Camel Lane: Trust the Adventure*) and another about returning (*Home Again, Home Again—Jiggety Jig*) in 2020. John and Doreen enjoy international travel, and since 2016 they have “adventured” their way through more than 20 housesits abroad, John says.

Doug worked for Area Exploration from 1998 to 2016. He and Elizabeth have two daughters, Haley and Madeline, both graduates of the Dhahran School. They retired to Colorado Springs and enjoy RV travel and hiking in the mountains. Doug is an avid amateur astronomer and recently published *The Aquila Mission*, which draws from his work in that field.

Anyone with questions about the reunion, or an interest in volunteering, may contact the hosts at half2020@gmail.com.

‘WOW!’

SAY VETERAN SAILORS

BY **ARTHUR CLARK**

Wow! What an experience, transiting the Panama Canal in a small boat!”

That was the word Jan. 23 from 81-year-old Marvin Stark and his wife, Ruth, 70, after they made the 48-mile canal crossing from the Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean in their 44-foot Nautitech catamaran named *Microbe*. The retirees’ granddaughter, Allison Stark Edwards, and her husband, Nick, made up the rest of the crew on the roughly 30-hour journey.

None of mariners was a novice. Marvin began learning to sail in the Arabian Gulf in 1975, the year he joined Aramco as a projects engineer. Ruth, who signed on with the company as a nurse in 1974 (and who met Marvin when they acted with the Abqaiq Players), soon joined him. They married in 1980 and retired to begin seafaring careers in 1995.

Allison and Nick had both made the Panama Canal transit before—she with her grandparents in 2003, and he with his parents.

The Starks, who live in Orangevale, Calif., when they aren’t at sea, had made an offer to buy the *Microbe* (which Marvin called “a floating condo”) when they attended the Annuitants Reunion in Texas last fall. Right after the reunion they flew from Austin to St. Martin in the Caribbean to seal the deal.

The \$300,000 vessel has almost all the comforts of a home on dry land, including appliances like a refrigerator, a freezer and a washer-dryer, plus a desalination unit that produces 16 gallons of potable water per hour, all powered by solar or wind energy.

A previous vessel had two bicycles onboard, which pleased Ruth.

“I’m not the sailor in the family,” she said. “I go because I don’t want to be left behind!” If that’s the case, she’s certainly gone the extra nautical mile, including two Atlantic crossings.

On the couple’s first Atlantic trip, in 1999, two other Saudi Aramco retirees—Tom Tirrell from Arkansas and Steve Wann from Maryland—helped sail their 44-foot Catana catamaran, *Chesapeake*.

Far left: Marvin Stark, left, shared duties with a Panama Canal advisor at the helm of the *Microbe*, shown during its nighttime passage through the first set of locks. *Left:* Granddaughter Allison Stark Edwards works with a canal line-handler, at top.





Traffic on the Panama Canal ranged from tiny vessels like the 44-foot *Microbe*, captained by Marvin Stark, to ocean liners a hundred times its size, like the one close behind.

“All four of us were good sailors from Ras Tanura Yacht Club. It took us 20 days to cross from the Canary Islands to Barbados,” said Marvin. Wann debarked there, but Tirrell stayed aboard up through the Caribbean Islands to St. Lucia.

Their second crossing, in 2009, was more ambitious: The Starks sailed from Malaysia across the Indian Ocean to India, then around the southern Arabian Peninsula and up the Red Sea, accompanied by retirees Bob and Judy MacDonnell. Then the Starks sailed into the Mediterranean to Turkey and across the Atlantic to St. Lucia.

They learned sailing by doing.

“I never saw a sailboat until I was 40 years old,” said Marvin, whose first boat in Ras Tanura was a 16-foot Hobie Cat.

“I spent the first year upside down,” he recalled with a chuckle. “The second year I ran into everybody. The third year I finally got it.”

When the Starks retired, “we bought a boat before we bought a house,” Marvin said. That 31-foot trimaran, dubbed *Noor* (Arabic for “light”), was an “absolute hotrod,” he noted.

Three years later the couple flew to France and bought their first catamaran, *Chesapeake*.

“We were dangerous for the first six months, but we learned,” Marvin said, joking that he and Ruth like the double-hulled boats because “you can fill them full of water and they won’t sink, and you can sail in a little as three feet of water.”

They upgraded to a 47-foot Catana 471 named *Toucan Tango* in Malaysia in 2007 in preparation for their journey to Arabia and across the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. They sold that vessel during the ’09 recession, but in 2015 purchased another Catana, dubbed *Toucan*, that they sailed in the Caribbean. Marvin suffered a mild stroke there in 2016 and they sold that boat.

“Now an 81-year-old with eight stints in my heart arteries has another catamaran and we have sailed it 1,000 miles from St. Martin to Aruba, Cartagena and Panama,” he wrote in January after transiting the canal.





Above: Some 500 years separated this' view of Cartagena, Columbia, where the Starks stopped en route to Panama, and its 16th-century fort, Castillo San Felipe de Barajas, left, that the couple visited onshore.



“We are ‘30/30’ sailors,” meaning that they stay between 30 degrees Latitude North and 30 degrees Latitude South, “where the winds are pleasant and warm,” he said.

Though sailing is fun, it can also be daunting, the Starks agreed, citing experiences like getting “up close and personal” with lightning during thunderstorms. “Bolts come right down to the water and light up everything around you,” said Ruth.

“You get tired of getting beaten up” in a storm, “but we’ve never feared for our lives, ever,” Marvin added. But he admitted that on one Atlantic crossing “we got so exhausted we parked in the middle of the

ocean for 14 hours” using a 24-foot-diameter parachute sea anchor, before recouping the energy to continue.

And they rode out Hurricane Floyd aboard *Chesapeake* in New Haven, Conn., in 1999. The storm “sounded like a jet plane all night,” Marvin said.

They don’t plan to cross “any big oceans” at this time in their sailing careers, but they still aim to enjoy much of what they found from the “old days” at sea, he said.

“It’s a laid-back life. At home I don’t have time to read a book; on a boat you take life easy. We always try to be back to the boat before dark to take a swim.”

The joy of sailing isn’t just about



sailing. There is a camaraderie among boat-owners—a “community of sailors” whose members share information and safety tips.

“When you are sailing there are thousands of people sailing like you are,” Ruth noted, adding that she and her husband have met other retired Aramcons “on their own boats in various parts of the world.” In Turkey, for example, they bumped into Richard Leighton and his family from Canada, as well as John and Maurine Morgan from Britain; in the Caribbean they met Dean and Marie French from Wisconsin.

There is also the joy of discovering places and meeting people that non-sailors might never experience.

The Starks went ashore in Oman, Yemen, Eritrea, Sudan and Egypt when they sailed around the Arabian Peninsula 2009 with the MacDonnells.

“We were worried that we wouldn’t be welcomed. But the man in the street couldn’t have been kinder and more welcoming,” Ruth said.

In Yemen, while the MacDonnells went overland from Aden to Dhahran to attend the Expatriates Reunion, the Starks took time off from boat-minding to catch a bus to Sana’a, where they were invited to a wedding.

There weren’t any lightning strikes or wedding invitations on their latest cruise. But transiting the Panama Canal was still a memorable experience.

They crossed through the Gatun locks on the east side of the canal “side-tied to another 44-foot catamaran from Austria,” wrote Marvin. “We did not get going until after dark.

“Each boat had four line-handlers, a captain and canal advisor. All had important jobs and had to pay close attention.”

The *Tokyo Spirit*, a 690-foot, 6,500-ton cargo ship towered over them as they rose 270 feet to the level of the freshwater lake after which the locks are named.

Clockwise from above left: Microbe shared the Caribbean with giant container vessels and ocean liners; the fort at Cartagena, Columbia, offered a look into the region’s past, when cannon guarded Spanish dominions; the Starks docked in a peaceful bay at Cartagena.



“The four line-handlers onboard the *Microbe* threw a thin rope with a ‘monkey fist’ on the end, which they tied to a big loop on the end of our 180-foot-long ropes, one on each corner of the boat. Then the canal worker put the big loop onto a bollard,” Marvin wrote.

“Our line-handlers then tugged on the lines as required to keep us in the center of the lock, as we went up. Lots of turbulence!

“When the lock was full, the canal workers walked the ropes ahead to bollards on the next lock, as we motored forward slowly. Larger vessels have an electric locomotive that moves them.”

Arriving in Lake Gatun at 7 p.m., they

side-tied to a large mooring.

“Next day at 9 a.m., a new canal advisor arrived and we motored 26 miles across Lake Gatun,” wrote Marvin.

“Then into the narrows and to the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores down locks. Small boats go up locks after a large ship if space is available; down locks, the small boats go first.”

Once again, they rafted with the Austrian catamaran, this time entering the locks in front of a big cruise ship. As the locks emptied, their line-handlers carefully let out ropes to keep them centered.

“The last lock was more difficult, with

strong winds and lots of freshwater meeting saltwater,” Marvin wrote. “Then we motored to Balboa Yacht Club, near Panama City, and attached to another big mooring where we spent the night.

“Next day, sails up and headed to Vista Mar Marina—a new marina 47 miles down the Panama coast. This is where Allison and Nick had left their boat when they flew to St. Martin to help us make the 1,000-mile Caribbean crossing and canal transit.”

Everyone got a workout on that last leg of sailing.

“First, we put up the big red gennaker [sail] and then the wind cranked up to 30 knots (35 miles per hour) and we could not get the roller furler to work!” Marvin wrote. “So we had to douse the sail in a mad scramble to keep it out of the water. Finally, we got it squared away and sailed to the marina.

“Then we had to back into a slip with cross wind blowing 25-30 knots. Luckily, we made it, the second try.”

“It helped to remember my early sailing days with an ultralight F-31 trimaran, when one had to really, really consider the side winds,” he added. “You need to position yourself; then go fast. One can maybe control the back of a boat, but if you stop forward motion you loose way [slow down] and the wind controls the front.”

“Will hang here in a nice marina for a couple of weeks,” he wrote. “Meanwhile, the winds continue to blow—we had 40 knots last night. Today we had to shut down the wind-vane charger; it was screaming and all eight batteries were fully charged!”

“It was a real privilege to sail a small boat through the Panama Canal accompanied by experienced grandchildren,” he said, adding that they aimed “to slowly cruise to Mexico and in April fly back to California for the summer.”

“Interestingly, most people think of Panama as south of the United States,” he noted. “The Panama Canal is east of the entire USA, so to get to California we have to go west toward Hawaii.”

But in mid-February, their thoughts were on other things.

“As I write this, our feet are in the sand at a small palapa (palm leaf) restaurant on the beach at Tamarindo Bay, Costa Rica,” Marvin wrote.

Wow, indeed!



Top: The *Microbe* moored at St. Martin in the Caribbean before the start of the Starks' latest cruise. Left: She anchored in the bay at the couple's first port of call: Oranjestad in Aruba, a Dutch island off the coast of Venezuela.

ANOTHER SAILOR'S TAKE ON SAILING

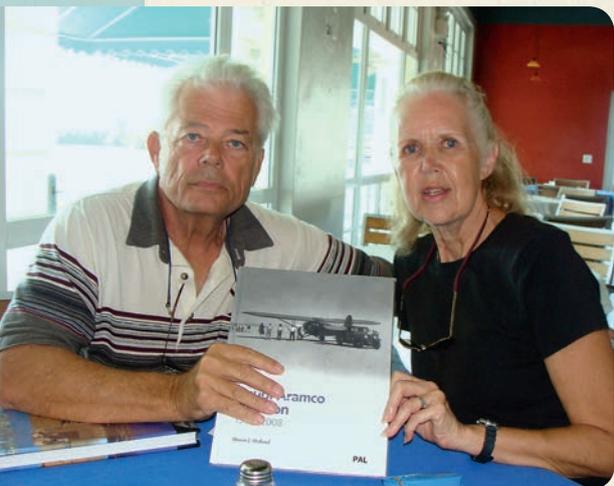
Almost exactly a decade before Marvin and Ruth Stark made their second passage of the Panama Canal, Aviation Dept. retiree Jay Holland also transited the waterway for the second time. His destination in 2009 was the same as the Starks in 2019: California.

Like the Starks, Holland took up serious sailing after he retired, in 2003. But there was one big difference: The Starks had many years of Gulf sailing under their belts when they left Saudi Arabia, while Holland had none.

When he and his wife, Karen, retired, “I thought it would be fun to live on a boat and sail around the world for a while,” Holland said.

Even after Karen pointed out that he’d “never sailed on a boat,” he didn’t abandon the dream.

Karen Holland joined her husband, Jay, on his 2009 Panama Canal passage, shortly after the Aviation Dept. retiree had published his book, *Saudi Aramco Aviation: 1934-2006*.



In 2004, he got in touch with a boat owner who needed crew to sail his boat back from Hawaii to Newport, Ore. That trip hooked him, and the same year he signed on with a U.K.-based boat-delivery company.

Over the next six years he delivered nine lovely boats from seven different countries to customers on both coasts of the U.S., racking up more than 28,000 nautical miles.

His first canal crossing came as first mate in October 2008, and the second as captain in January 2009.

Karen joined him for the last crossing, on a 40-foot Robertson and Caine catamaran, as did Aramco Services Company attorney Mike Omer and his wife, Marla. The trip, like the latest one by the Starks, began in St. Martin.

After reaching the Pacific, Holland piloted the ship to a client in Long Beach.

Delivering boats is much less relaxing than sailing them for fun, says Holland, adding that he wouldn’t recommend it as a pastime for retirees.

“You have to like moving a boat as fast as possible with [a crew of] people you don’t know...just a résumé and usually a phone or e-mail interview,” he said. “You have a bare boat with minimum food and are sailing 24 hours a day from departure till delivery, usually 30 to 50 days.”

Holland has never owned a boat himself, preferring to deliver vessels that cost in the range of “\$500,000 to over a million dollars.” That way, the owner pays the bills for any “fixes or repairs needed at the end.”

Holland’s last cruise, in September 2011, had sad results, but on land rather



Jay Holland mans the deck en route to his 2009 Panama Canal transit.

than at sea.

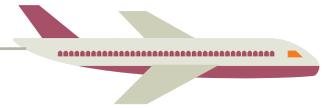
That summer and fall, drought-stricken Central Texas was a wildfire epicenter. And while he was helping a boat owner sail from Hawaii to San Francisco, the Hollands’ home near Bastrop, Texas, burned down.

Fortunately, no one was hurt. But he hasn’t gone to sea since.

Flying High

ARAMCO GALS SHOW THEIR STUFF IN THE SKIES

By Jane Waldron Grutz



Aramco Brats are often ahead of the curve when it comes to succeeding in their chosen professions. This certainly applies to the many young women now making names for themselves in the fields of business, law, medicine, science, the arts and more. Among them are Julie Cruze and Katherine Trench, who made their childhood dreams come true and fly intercontinental routes for major U.S. airlines. Cruze (RT93), the daughter of Rosie and the late Joe Antequino, is a pilot for United Airlines, and Trench (DH89), the daughter of Rick and Mari Trench, flies for American Airlines.



I feel like I'm going on vacation every time I go to work.

—Julie Cruze

When Julie Cruze isn't flying B-777s across the Pacific to East Asia for United Airlines, she's likely piloting World War II bombers for the Collings Foundation, a Massachusetts-based educational organization dedicated to preserving vintage military planes and related ground equipment, and telling their stories across the country.

For Cruze, flying is fun, whether she's at the controls of a 366-seat Boeing 777, a wartime bomber or her own two-seater Citabria.

"The simplicity of a small plane is a nice contrast to the complexity of an airliner,"

says Cruze, who experienced her first flight on a small aircraft when she attended Space Camp in Huntsville, Ala., in 1994.

Cruze was on summer break from Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire when an interest in space exploration prompted her to enroll in her camp's "Aviation Challenge" program. To her delight, the program concluded with an optional ride in a plane not much larger than the Citabria. Cruze signed up and boarded a flight that would profoundly affect her career aspirations.

Almost as soon as she returned to Phillips Exeter she began flying lessons at the nearby Hampton Airfield. She continued



Julie Cruze (center) poses with an all-female B-767 United Airlines flight crew.

lessons through her years at Pepperdine University in California and afterward until 2005, when she had enough hours and ratings to be certified as a flight instructor in Kissimmee, Fla.

Hours and ratings are the basis for a career as a commercial pilot. More than 1,500 hours and an instrument rating are required to fly for a regional airline, and even more experience and ratings to be considered for the coveted role of pilot for a major airline.

By the time Cruze had completed five years with a regional airline, she had the experience she needed to try her hand at almost anything airborne.

She got her big chance in 2012 when a vacancy came up to fly for the Collings Foundation. Like all of its volunteer pilots, Cruze learned to fly the B-17 Flying Fortress, the B-24 Liberator and the B-25 Mitchell (named after aviation-pioneer Major Gen. "Billy" Mitchell).

As part of the foundation's annual summertime Wings of Freedom tour these iconic aircraft and others travel to cities across the continental U.S. Visitors get a chance to walk through the planes, take a short flight if they wish and learn a little about the aerial history of World War II.

Many visitors are children or young people who hope to become pilots themselves. Although Cruze is not married and has no children of her own, she loves to encourage her young visitors. "I tell them to concentrate on math and physics and to begin flying lessons as soon as they can," she says.

Cruze's career as a commercial pilot began in 2007 when she joined Republic Airlines. She flew Embraer 170s and 190s



"mostly up and down the East Coast," she says, gaining the qualifications she needed to join United Airlines in 2014.

After assignments piloting B-757s and B-767s to cities throughout Europe and South America, she now flies B-777s out of San Francisco to cities like Taipei, Taiwan, and Shanghai and Beijing in China. These are long hauls, lasting 12 to 15 hours, so Cruze is not in the cockpit the whole time.

"Flights longer than 12 hours require

four pilots," says Cruze, allowing two to remain at the controls for about eight hours and then be replaced by two who have rested in bunks behind the cockpit. Pilots and crew normally lay over a day or so before beginning the return trip, offering time to shop, see the local sights or simply relax.

"I feel like I'm going on vacation every time I go to work," says Cruze, who can't imagine a more fascinating career than flying—for men or for women.

Opposite, and below l-r: Julie Cruze looks out from the cockpit of a B-25 bomber she flies for the Collings Foundation; the 1993 Ras Tanura School graduate prepares to take off in a B-17 bomber; she stands proudly beside her two-seater Citabria.





In the simulator you have no time to think; you just have to react.

—Katherine Trench

Every nine months American Airlines pilot Katherine Trench begins the training session she needs to maintain her Federal Aviation Administration certification. It normally starts in the classroom and concludes with two or more days in a cockpit simulator—a mockup with a computer screen where the windshield would be, seats for two pilots and a third seat behind for the instructor. The instructor monitors the pilots as they face myriad events that might come up in flight.

“When you’re in the cockpit you have no time to think; you just have to react,” says Trench, who loves to practice the many different approaches, maneuvers and “especially all the single-engine work!”

In fact, Trench loves everything about flying, and always has.

Even as a little girl, she envisioned herself as an airline pilot. And though her parents had their doubts (fewer than five percent of U.S. airline pilots are women), they finally let her begin flying lessons in 1993, first near their new retirement home in San Antonio, Texas, and later at the highly regarded Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona, Fla.

In her senior year Trench won an internship that led to a fulltime piloting job with Merlin Airways in Billings, Mont. Starting out as a flight engineer, she quickly rose through the ranks to become a first officer and then captain of the 19-seat Fairchild Metroliners that she flew throughout the continental U.S., including Alaska.

In February 2001 Trench joined American Airlines, flying B-757s out of JFK Airport in



Above: Pilots practice maneuvers, landing approaches and single-engine flying in these cockpit simulators. Inset: Katherine Trench and her husband, James Hay, take a break from Airbus-321 simulator training.



New York to Europe. Seven months later, after hijacked American and United passenger planes crashed in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania, “people just stopped flying,” she says—not for weeks, but for years.

Many pilots were furloughed, including Trench, who considers herself incredibly lucky to have continued to fly B-757s, first with two U.S.-based charter airlines and then with Thomas Cook, flying out of Newcastle, England, to Greece, Turkey, the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands, Spain, Portugal and, once a week, to Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

In 2007 American recalled Trench to New York where she soon ran into Capt. James Hay, with whom she had flown before being furloughed. They began dating and married in 2012, only to discover that although they both flew B-757s out of JFK, their schedules varied so widely that they felt “lucky if we could spend a Tuesday afternoon together,” she says.

They finally solved the problem by transferring to the Airbus-321 fleet, allowing them to fly as a team at least once or

Rick and Mari Trench flank their daughter, Katherine, surrounded by the crew of the Airbus-321 she piloted from San Antonio to Dallas-Fort Worth—with them onboard. “It was just a quick flight, but it was very special to me,” says the 1989 Dhahran Schools graduate.

twice a month, providing three to six days together “on the road.” They usually fly out of Philadelphia to Seattle, San Francisco or Los Angeles.

Most of their flights have been trouble-free, although both clearly remember the time a young woman suffered a miscarriage on a B-767 they were piloting from Europe to JFK.

“We were halfway across the Atlantic and there really wasn’t anywhere we could go,” Trench remembers. “It’s easy to divert here in America, but we have to put a lot more thought into picking a diversion airport when we’re flying over an ocean and internationally.

“Not all airports have proper medical facilities, or fuel for our aircraft, or customs for our passengers...so there’s a lot to consider. In this case we continued to JFK.”

Over the years they’ve also faced bird strikes and fuel-tank leaks. But with help from dispatchers on the ground they have always landed safely.

Fortunately, in-flight mechanical problems are extremely rare in today’s airliners, and whether it’s a B-757 or an Airbus-321, Trench loves to be the one in the pilot’s seat.

“It’s nothing I can explain,” she says. “I just love to fly.”



IN MEMORIAM

SAQIB MASOOD ANSARI

January 12, 2019

He joined the Accounting Dept. in Dhahran in 1977, transferred to Abqaiq and retired in 1985. Survived by his wife, Neelofar Saqib, sons Muhammad Fahad and Muhammad Yasir, and daughters Sehrish and Mulaikahi. Correspondence may be sent to Fahad at zee.ali82@gmail.com.

CUD T. BAIRD IV

December 24, 2018

He worked for Corporate Planning from 1997-2000. Survived by his wife, Bonnie, and daughter, Ava Simon. Correspondence may be sent to Bonnie at 2605 Hillside Road, Southbridge, MA 01550, or desertbonnie@yahoo.com.

ROBERT C. BEVER

December 31, 2018

He joined Aramco in 1997 and retired as senior internal consultant, Corporate Planning, in 2007. Survived by his wife, Carey Cole, and children Greg, Patrick, Gretchen Davis and Amanda Gonzalez. Correspondence may be sent to Carey at 29058 Axis View, Boerne, TX 78006, or careydcollection@gmail.com.

BRENDA BRODIE

February 7, 2019

Survived by her husband, retiree Stevan H. "Hall" Brodie, and children Kyle and Layne. The family may be contacted c/o Northside United Methodist Church, 2799 Northside Dr. NW, Atlanta, GA 30305.

EDWARD BULLARD

August 28, 2017

He joined the company in 1960 and retired in 1987 after a career in Project Management. Predeceased by his wife, Sylvia.

RALPH BURWELL

November 16, 2018

He joined the New York office in 1950, transferred to Abqaiq in 1954 and resigned in 1957, rejoining the company in 1976 and retiring in 1989 as a computer-systems analyst at OSPAS. Predeceased by his wife, Ruth, and survived by children Thomas, Margaret, Louis, Joseph and Gerald.

TINY POYTHRESS CULLER

March 19, 2019

Survived by her husband, retiree Thomas Culler, Jr., and daughters Mischa Dillon and Tracey Kimbrell. She was a casual employee in the Loss Prevention Dept.

MARY FUGATE

December 17, 2018

Survived by her husband, retiree Frank Fugate, and daughter, Jan. Correspondence may be sent to Frank at 11150 Pinehurst Dr., Austin, TX 78747.

SHIRLEY F. GASPERETTI

September 17, 2018

Predeceased by her husband, retiree Art Gasperetti, whom she joined in Ras Tanura in 1949, and survived by children John and Susan. Correspondence may be sent to Susan at shollingsworth@aiohomecare.com.

BRUCE L. HANUSEK

October 23, 1941

He joined Aramco as a planning engineer in 1975 and transferred to Project Management, retiring in 1999. Survived by his wife, Susan, sons Chance, Twee and Paul, and daughters Michelle McDaniel, Liza Pudwill and Jealyn Woffindin. Correspondence may be sent to the family at 18195 S. Still Lea Place, Sahuarita, AZ 85629, or schmousecatcher@msn.com.

JEANINE ANNETTE HOGAN

January 17, 2016

Predeceased by her husband, retiree Jeremiah "Jerry" Hogan, and survived by sons Steve, Peter, Robert and Frank. Correspondence may be sent to Steve at stevesidiki@yahoo.com.

BARBARA JEAN HUNT HOMOLKA

October 21, 2018

Predeceased by her husband, George, and survived by children Leslie, David, Caroline, Alice and Ann. Correspondence may be sent to Leslie Homolka Craigmyle at 246 W. Harvey St., #1R, Philadelphia, PA 19144, or lesliecraigmyle@gmail.com.

RUSSELL J. HUSTED

December 4, 2018

He joined the Accounting Dept. in 1977 and retired in 2000. Survived by his wife, Opal, and sons Michael and

Randy, and his first wife, Susan Husted Cowles, and children Russell, Delbert and Staci Husted Hosford. Correspondence may be sent to Susan at 514 Fall Creek Dr., Huffman TX 77336, to share with their children.

LINDA PORTER JABRI

December 31, 2018

Survived by her husband, retiree Saad Jabri, and children Laura and Alan. Correspondence may be sent to Laura at mindsigh@hotmail.com.

HENRY N. KNIGHT

He joined Aramco in 1973 and retired as supervisor, Well Material Forecast Unit, Drilling & Workover Engineering, in 1987. Survived by his wife, Ellen, and children Amelia Gonzales, Jocelyn and Aaron. Correspondence may be sent to Ellen at HNK-EMK@cox.net.

ROBERT "BOB" LONG

November 1, 2018

Survived by his wife, Mary Sue, and their four children. He joined Aramco in 1957 and retired after 30-year career.

GORDON G. MORRIS

March 23, 2019

He joined the company in 1974 and retired as a project manager in 1984. Survived by his son, Lee.

EDITH "EDIE" OFFIELD

Survived by her husband, retiree James Dale Offield, and children Donald, Kimberly Andrus and Karen McIntosh. Correspondence may be sent to Dale at 11102 Monmouth, San Antonio, TX 78239, or jamesoffield2@gmail.com.

JACK W. ROSE

April 13, 2019

He retired in 1992. Survived by his wife, Gae, and children Gordon, David, Jacqueline, Scott and Justin. The family may be contacted c/o The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 650 Stadium Ave., Provo, UT 84604.

OTELA "TELA" SEIM

March 8, 2018

Survived by her husband, retiree Ted Seim, and children Sherri, Stephen, Scot and Shana. Correspondence may be sent to the family c/o www.columbiamortuary.com.

CORNELL SEYMOUR

February 3, 2019

He joined Aramco as a chemical engineer in Abqaiq in 1980 and retired in 2012. He contributed stories to *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah*, focusing especially on youth sports. Survived by his wife, Shirley, daughters Jamila Oni, Zakiya Ayo and Ayisha Uri, and son Christopher. Correspondence may be sent to Shirley at 4802 Lismoor Trace SW, Mableton, GA 30126.

MARY SMILEY

March 21, 2019

Predeceased by her husband, Walter C. "Pete" Smiley, and survived by children Deborah Yamashita, Margaret Womack, Leilani Page and Michael. She

joined Aramco in 1948, the year she met and married her husband.

ROGER S. SMITH

April 7, 2019

He served as a special teacher in Dhahran from 1960-65. Survived by his wife, Edna, and daughters Elizabeth "Beth" Eddy and Cynthia Thom. Correspondence may be sent to Beth at 35 Reynolds St., South Portland, ME 04106, or e.eddyhvs@gmail.com.

VILAWAN SONNTAG

January 5, 2019

Survived by her husband, retiree Albert Sonntag, and sons Sudkiat, Navi, Albert and Carl. Correspondence may be sent to the family c/o Winter Oak

Funeral Home, 2421 Old Vineland Rd., Kissimmee, FL 34746.

DOROTHY BENTON ST. MORRIS

January 2, 2019

Predeceased by her husband, retiree Dan St. Morris, and survived by her daughter, Sharon Harriss. Correspondence may be sent to Sharon at bh12742@gmail.com.

GLADYS THAILER

March 10, 2019

She worked as a secretary at Aramco Services Company. Survived by her son, Mark, who may be contacted c/o Brookside Funeral Home-Cypress Creek, 9149 Highway 6 North, Houston, TX 77095.

NASSIR AL-AJMI—SAUDI ARAMCO PIONEER

Nassir M. Al-Ajmi, who joined Aramco in 1950 and played an important role in the rapid development of the company and the kingdom, died October 6, 2018.

Al-Ajmi "was a key contributor and a shaper of the transformation of Saudi Arabia from the pre-oil era," said Saudi Aramco President and CEO Amin Nasser.

Indeed, his autobiography, published in 1995, is titled *Legacy of a Lifetime: An Essay on the Transformation of Saudi Arabia*.

"His life is an inspiration to many," said Nasser. "... from a Bedouin background [he] became a top business leader, a senior government official, and also a widely respected community leader."

During his career Al-Ajmi was party to major corporate decisions

and major investments in projects such as the Master Gas System in the 1970s. He was also Aramco's first vice president of Industrial Relations and senior vice president of Operations Services, where he played a lead role in the Saudization of the company.

After he retired in 1993 Al-Ajmi was appointed president of the Saudi Railways Organization. He also served as a member of the Shura Council.

Frank Fugate, a former senior vice president, summed up what many colleagues felt about Al-Ajmi in a message on *AramcoExpats.com*. "A truly remarkable person who had the respect of all his friends and employees because he treated them with respect and was completely honest with them," he wrote.

GEORGE PAPPAS—'YOUR INFLUENCE WILL LAST'

George Pappas, who had a hand in designing and building critical electrical infrastructure in the Eastern Province for 43 years, died Jan. 13, leaving warm memories among colleagues and friends.

In 1953 he started a Power Systems career that took him between Dhahran and Ras Tanura and, in 1971, to Aramco Overseas Company in The Hague. He and his family returned to Dhahran in 1974, and in 1977 he moved to the Saudi Consolidated Electric Company (SCECO) in the Eastern Province, which Aramco initially managed for the government.

He retired as manager of SCECO's Engineering and Design Services Dept. (EDSD) in 1986, saying he was "proud of the progress made in extending the power-generation and -transmission system

to the most remote villages in the Eastern Province."

Fellow-retiree Bob Radford remembers flying with Pappas in the mid-'70s to a spot "out past Abqaiq." After looking around the site's "acres of desert," Radford says, Pappas "jammed his heel into the sand" and said, "That will be the southeast corner of the Shedgum Power Plant!"

That plant, among many other power facilities, went online thanks to the efforts of Pappas and his co-workers—who honored him with a plaque at Qurayyah Power Plant reading:

"It is with great pride that the Survey Division has designated its prime monument...after the man who has supported and protected this division through his tenure as chief design engineer...Mr. George Pappas. Though gone from the kingdom, your influence will last."

He is survived by his wife, Mary, and children John, Margaret and Irene. Condolences may be sent to Mary at 2525 Pot Spring Rd., Apt S-532, Timonium, MD 21093.

In honor of their heritage, President Barak Obama invited George and Mary Pappas to the White House in 2015 to join in Greek Independence Day celebrations. George met and married Mary in Rhodes, Greece, on his first vacation from Aramco in 1953.



THE PASSING OF A KNIGHT

Saudi Aramco and Aramco Services Company mourned the death on Feb. 1 of ASC's longtime Public Affairs director, Shafiq Kombargi. He died at his home in Beirut.

His many colleagues remembered him as someone whose friendship and fellowship spanned numerous continents, religions and cultures.

John Duke Anthony, CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, called him "a knight [whose]...sustained imprint upon innumerable United States'-affiliated and cross-cultural institutions is massive.... [He] bequeathed Americans and the citizens of other countries enhanced cross-cultural connections and new lenses through which to view the Arab and Islamic regions and beyond."

Retired *AramcoWorld* Editor Rob Arndt described him as "a nobleman, loyal and kind to friends and employees, with a strong sense of justice and the proper way of doing things. Forced by historical events to adapt again and again to new circumstances, he nonetheless never lost his balance or his principles."

Born in Jaffa, Palestine, and a refugee from the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Kombargi worked for 50 years with Aramco subsidiaries in Lebanon, the Netherlands and the U.S.

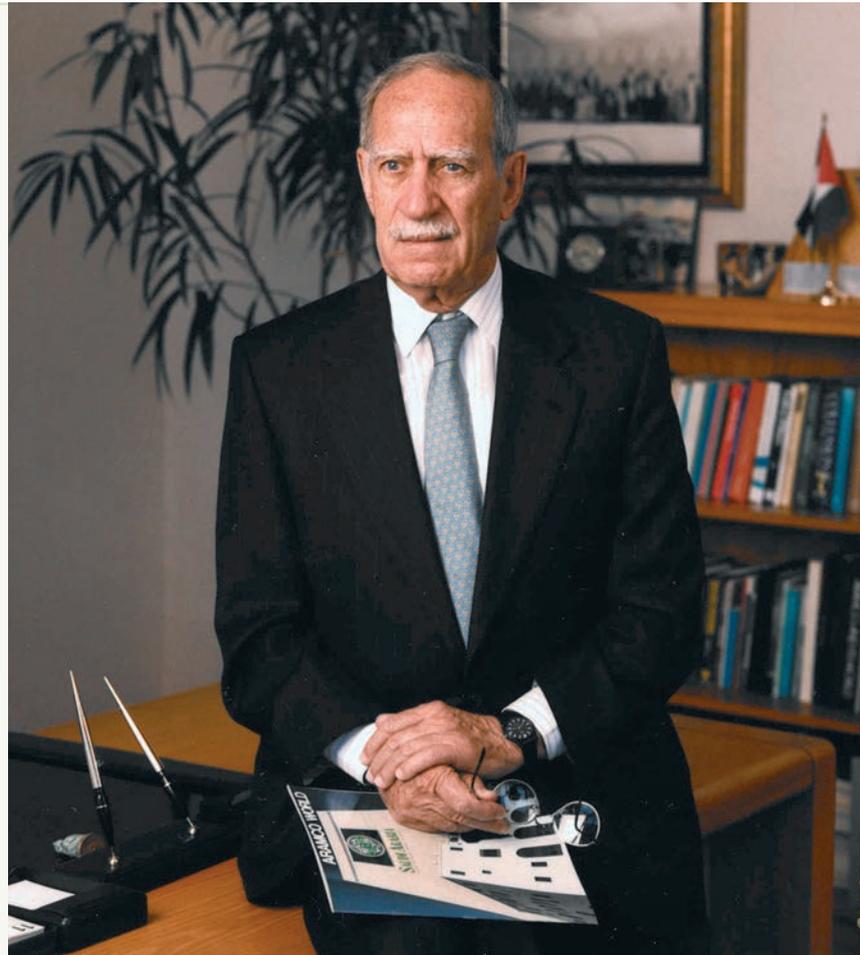
He earned a bachelor's degree in political science at the American University of Beirut and met his wife, Asma, in the Lebanese capital.

In 1949, when Aramco opened recruiting offices in Lebanon, Jordan and Gaza, Aramco Overseas Company (AOC) in Beirut hired him as a recruiting advisor. A 1951 photograph shows him examining the carpentry of other Palestinian refugees in his role as a recruiter.

He later became an AOC representative handling recruitment,



Shafiq Kombargi inspects the carpentry of fellow Palestinian refugees as part of his job as a recruiter at Aramco Overseas Company in Beirut in 1951.



Shafiq Kombargi served as director of Public Affairs at Aramco Services Company in Houston from 1980 until he retired in 1999. A native of Palestine, he strongly supported the work of *AramcoWorld* to further cross-cultural understanding.

purchasing and traffic duties for the region covering Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Jordan. One of his first assignments included buying and shipping fresh fruit and vegetables to company commissaries in the Eastern Province.

In 1974 he became AOC general manager in charge of administration. With the onset of civil war in Lebanon he was transferred to AOC in The Hague, and in 1977 he moved Houston to serve as administrator of ASC's Foreign Service Employment Dept. In 1980 he was named director of ASC Public Affairs.

In the U.S. he continued to promote cultural-bridging work. He was on the board of directors of the Arab-American Cultural Foundation in Washington, D.C., and active with the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Jerusalem Fund. He also led a successful campaign to endow a chair of Arab Studies at Rice University in Houston.

For many years he was responsible for publishing *AramcoWorld*, the company's award-winning cultural magazine.

After retiring in 1999 he divided his time between Houston and Beirut. He never had a birth certificate, but his family says he lived for more than 100 years.

He is survived by his wife and children Amer, Alma, Aliyya, Basil and Amina. Condolences may be sent to Asma at 347 Dohaet el Hoss, Aramoun, Lebanon.

Al~Ayyam Al~Jamilah الأيام الجميلة

ISSN-1319-1512

Aramco Services Company
Public Affairs Department
P.O. Box 2106
Houston, Texas 77252-2106

PRSR STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Houston, TX
Permit No. 625



Retiree Saluted for Service

Dr. Arthur Bobb, an ophthalmologist at the Dhahran Health Center from 1963 to 1984, joined 80 veterans from the Korean War, World War II and Vietnam War on April 13 for the SE Florida Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. The 93-year-old retiree, who served as an Air Force flight surgeon during the Korean War, said highlights of the day included viewing the changing of the guard at Arlington National Cemetery and visiting the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

ASC President Basil Abul-Hamayel saluted Bobb, saying in a message:

“On this very special day of remembrance and celebration, Aramco would like to

recognize you for your lifetime of dedicated service. We proudly join with others today to honor you and to let you know how grateful we are that you were part of our team.”

