

THE MAGAZINE FOR MALAYSIAN PETROLEUM CLUB MEMBERS (MALAYSIA)

RESOURCE

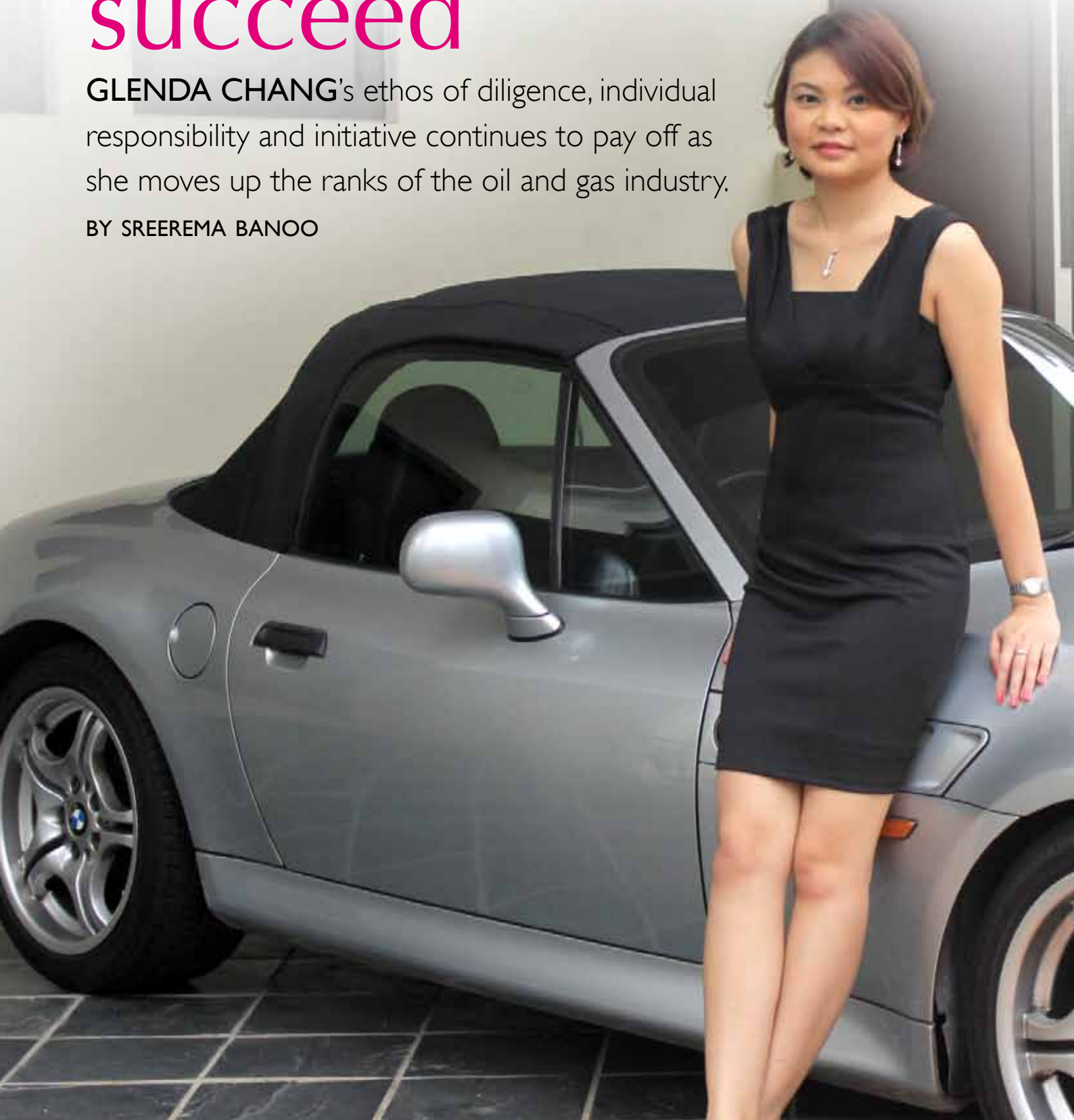
VOLUME 20 NO. 4 KDN: PP 7878/12/2012 (031611)



Driven to succeed

GLENDA CHANG's ethos of diligence, individual responsibility and initiative continues to pay off as she moves up the ranks of the oil and gas industry.

BY SREEREMA BANOO



“It’s important that young professionals be all-rounders – they need to have a balance between academic and professional pursuits, and extracurricular activities. They must network and get involved in charitable activities, because apart from contributing positively to society, such activities also improve teamwork, presentation and communication skills, as well as develop leadership skills. These are all important for a successful career in the oil and gas industry.”

At thirty-one, Glenda Chang is probably one of the younger managers in Malaysia’s oil and gas scene, an achievement that can only be credited to hard work, a willingness to learn and a never-say-die attitude. Chang, who is a Reservoir Engineering Manager at BC Petroleum Sdn Bhd/Roc Oil Malaysia, has been in the industry for about a decade and in that time, she has gained a wide range of experiences, from exploration and production to development planning.

“I’ve chosen a career path that’s different. Instead of spending my career in just one area, I’ve gone for the broader experience covering a few areas of the upstream oil and gas sector,” she says. And in every role she gives it her all, any less just wouldn’t do.

“One important lesson I’ve learnt is that if you work hard and learn fast then you will be able to move up the career ladder...so it doesn’t matter if the workload is heavy because it is an opportunity to learn and that experience will be put to good use,” she adds.

She admits this work ethic is at odds with many in her generation, the so-called Gen-Ys, who seek short-term rewards and prioritise work-life balance. “The rewards will come later, but first you have to put in the work,” she reiterates.

Growing up in Segamat, Johor, Chang realised that a strong work ethic would open doors and pave the way towards securing a financially stable career. “I realised early on the importance of education, my friends and classmates who came from families where education was a priority were in a better position. So I studied hard and wanted to be a role model for my family,” says Chang who has a younger brother.

She describes herself as a curious child with a liking for maths and science. “I found these subjects more fun than history or other arts subjects. I liked the creativity and innovation that maths and science offered, and my ambition was to either be an engineer or an accountant.” Having excelled in her Form Five examinations, Chang was given the opportunity to further her studies. “I was in search of a challenging course, and one that would lead to a career that would allow me to travel,” she says. While oil and gas was a relatively unknown sector in Segamat – its main economic activity being logging and plantation – her teachers suggested petroleum engineering.

She secured a scholarship from PETRONAS and gained a place in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia to study petroleum engineering. In her class of fifty, Chang was one of six women undergraduates. The competition among her course mates, she says, was keen. “It was during the downturn and many people said that it would be difficult to get a job, and indeed between 1998 and 2003 the oil and gas sector hardly hired any fresh graduates.”

To stand out and ensure that her prospects were bright, Chang did what came naturally – she worked hard, not only on her coursework but also invested time and energy in extra curricular activities, in particular the student chapter of the Society of Petroleum Engineers. An active member, she was the driving force behind many of the society’s programmes and activities including the maiden oil and gas symposium at the university. These efforts paid off when in 2002 she was awarded the ExxonMobil Merit Award.



The Journey Thus Far

Following her graduation in 2003, Chang joined Schlumberger as a Reservoir Engineer and for the next three years was involved in reservoir measurement and interpretation for exploration and drilling wells in Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines. In 2006 she was promoted to Senior Reservoir Engineer and was posted to Oman. The fact that it usually takes years before one gets an overseas posting speaks volumes of Chang's abilities and dedication to the job.

She describes the three-year assignment abroad as a career highlight. "I learnt a lot in those three years...I became stronger and in a way, grew up," she says. It was also one of the pivotal moments in her career not the least because of the challenges she faced as a young female engineer. "It was a culture shock. I was only 25 years old at the time, and culturally in the Middle East, a female engineer is not the norm. I worked hard to prove myself and to get people to listen to me. I went to the wellsite whenever there was an opportunity to learn about the production and operation facilities. At the end of the day, the clients saw my dedication and put their trust in my decisions."

A particularly rewarding challenge was studying for her Masters of Science degree in Petroleum Engineering, which she obtained from Heriot-Watt University in the UK while on a Schlumberger sponsorship. "I undertook this degree part-time while I continued to work for Schlumberger in Oman. I am particularly proud of my determination and discipline during this period".

Upon her return to Malaysia in 2009, Chang joined Carigali-Hess as a Reservoir Engineer in the Development Planning Department. It was an altogether different role – this time around, she was involved in the short and long term capacity planning including generating the production and capacity forecast for reserve estimations, platform shutdowns and maintenance, as well as economic models for strategic planning for the company's operations within the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area. She also led a special task force to manage short term tight capacity issues.

The experience was an enriching one. "I was involved in the project when it was in its relative infancy.... While it's true that there is probably better job security if you join a company whose projects are already underway, I asked myself if I could learn from such mature projects. At Carigali-Hess, I was exposed to planning activities and processes, which was a great opportunity for an engineer like myself from an oilfield services company background," she says. Soon though, it reached a point where she decided that it was time to broaden her experience. "At the MTJDA, it was all gas fields and I wanted to move on to oil fields."

In 2012, an opportunity arose to be a member of the pioneer team at BC Petroleum – a tripartite joint venture comprising PETRONAS Carigali Sdn Bhd, Roc Oil Malaysia (Holdings) Sdn Bhd and Dialog D & P Sdn Bhd (wholly owned subsidiary of Dialog Group Bhd). The company had, the year earlier, been awarded a risk service contract to develop the Balai Cluster Field. That this was a marginal field and a fast-track project appealed to Chang.

"It usually takes five to seven years before hitting first oil, here we had to get first oil in 18 months. I had also never experienced being a part of a start-up project. There was the opportunity not only to learn but mentor and delegate," she adds.

In her current role, Chang manages the reservoir engineering team, which consists of a petroleum engineer, a reservoir simulation engineer, a production engineer and a petrophysicist. Her team is also involved in the planning and drilling





of appraisal wells as well as the interpretation of data with the geoscience and drilling team. An important aspect of her job is to serve as the bridge between the subsurface and the production and operations teams.

She admits that the past year has been challenging. "You have to learn and at the same time teach. There are advisors to lend a hand but most of the time you need to be resourceful, it's a case of sink or swim," she says.

She's also had to make many critical decisions sometimes in the wee hours of the morning. "The workload has been heavy and the pace hectic because we are at the early stage of appraisal," she says. To date two successful wells have already been drilled (one in October 2012 and the other in December 2013) and a third one is on the horizon.

Gender Not an Issue

While she concedes that the oil and gas sector is a male dominated one, she says that this is changing with more women entering the sector. She reckons that while women are given opportunities to progress, at the end of the day it is skill, talent and attitude that count. "You have to demonstrate that you are a hard worker and prove yourself rather than rely on your gender."

She believes that the industry offers many opportunities for women. "If in the past women didn't want to get their hands dirty, today technology has made the industry increasingly female friendly. You can be based in the office and only visit the well site once in a while." She reckons that the industry needs to do more to publicise the opportunities available for women.

"This talent pool should not be ignored. Today most of the green fields are turning into brown fields; the era of easy oil is over. Finding oil is becoming more difficult and what's needed is innovation and creativity so we need new ideas," she says emphatically.

To succeed, she says women in the industry who are just starting out should have an open mind and never overlook an opportunity to learn.



Moving on Up

Going forward, Chang hopes to progress in the oil and gas sector and move up the career ladder to the senior management level. "I hope to be a successful leader one day," she says.

She also believes in nurturing the younger generation of engineers. Through career talks and more recently as a team leader for the Youth Round Table at the World Gas Conference in KL last year, she hopes to inspire the younger generation to develop a keen interest in science, technology, engineering and maths.

An active member of the Society of Petroleum Engineers, Chang continues to write technical papers, presenting them at conferences and symposiums. For her efforts, she received the 2012 Society of Petroleum Engineer North Asia Pacific Region Young Outstanding Member Award.

With her enthusiasm and commitment, one can be certain that the future remains bright for Chang.