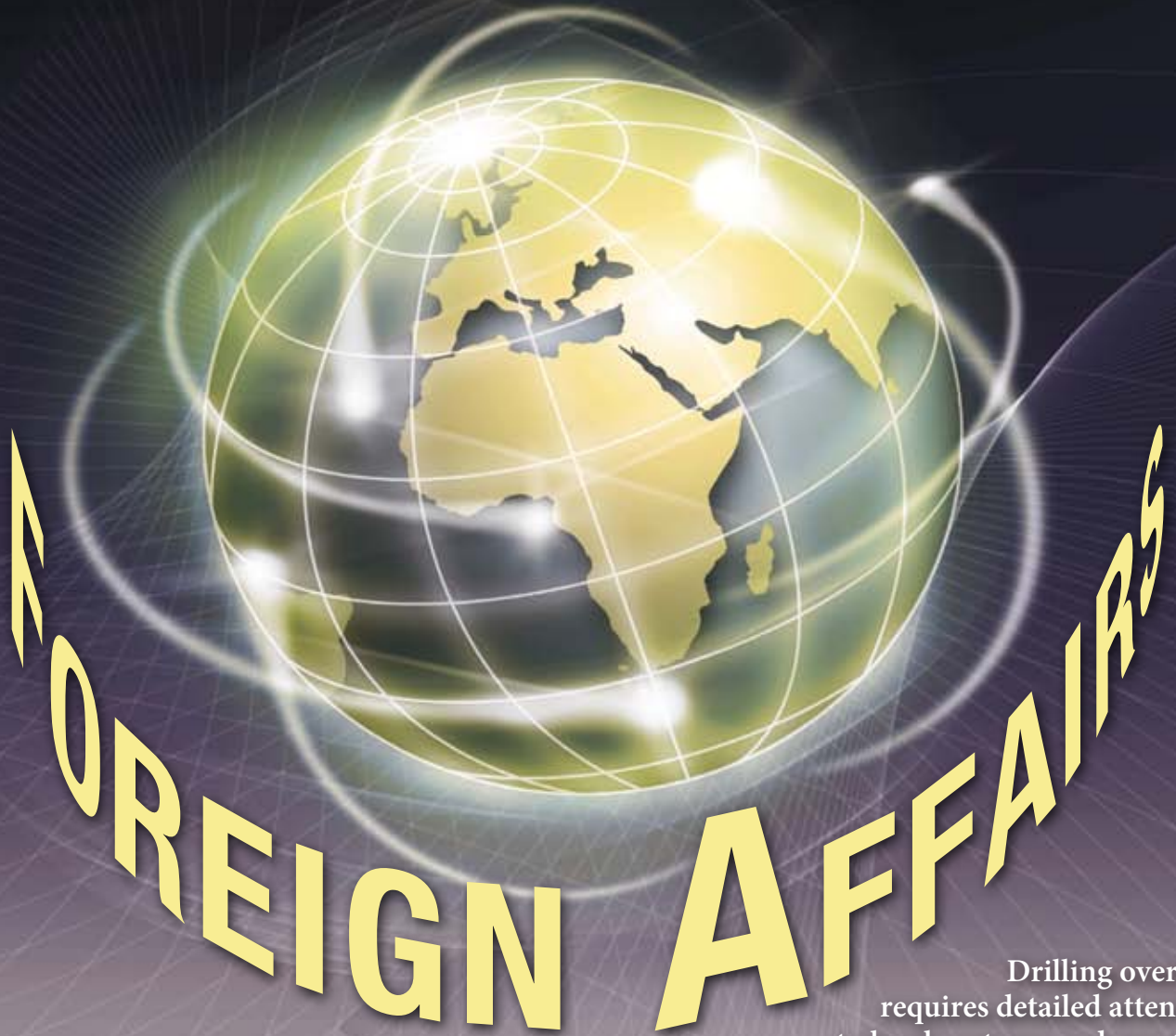


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FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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requires detailed attention
to local customs and practices

PLUS: Conference Update

Drilling conference team
extends abstracts deadline

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FEATURE STORY



FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Drilling overseas requires detailed attention to local customs and practices

by Jacqueline Louie

The first time that Calgarian Don Streu attended a Kazakh ceremony in his company's honour, he was a little surprised at what was on the menu.

"The mayor of the village invited us to his house for dinner. It's a great honour. They cooked a traditional Kazakh meal, including an entire sheep, to celebrate the occasion," says Streu, president and chief executive officer of Condor Petroleum, a Calgary-based oil and gas company with exploration and production activities in Canada and the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Streu and his colleagues quickly realized this was part of the Kazakh culture they needed to adapt to. "You don't want to insult your hosts. You're a guest there—that's really important to focus on," says Streu, who as his company's leader was required to eat the sheep's eyes, because it's up to him to maintain his company's vision. The organization's number 2 man, the chief financial officer, was expected

to eat the brains, because he needs intelligence to support the company's vision.

"So there are various parts of the sheep's head the leadership team has to enjoy with the local Kazakhs," Streu says, adding, with a smile, "sometimes it doesn't pay to be the leader."

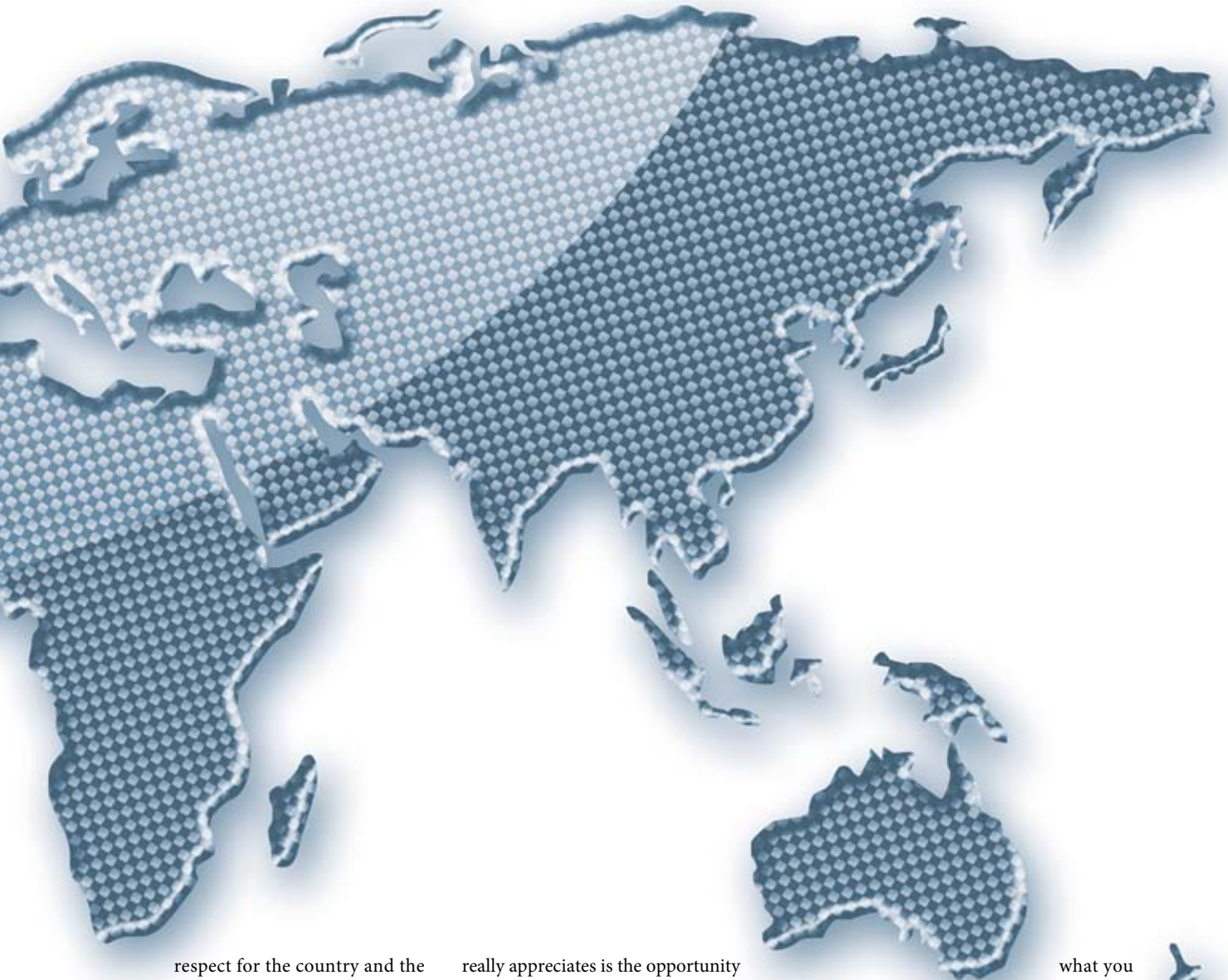
These are the kinds of things that Canadians working overseas need to keep in mind—not just the technical aspects of their job, but also how they interact with people in the country where they're working, who might have very different ways of thinking about things and different approaches to problem solving.

For anyone planning to work overseas, Streu recommends taking the time beforehand to read up on the country you'll be going to, in order gain an understanding of its history, people and politics.

"You have to understand how the system itself operates—the political system, the cultural norms and what makes the country tick. If possible, visit the region in advance," says Streu, who over the course of a 22-year career with Chevron worked not only in Canada and the United States, but also lived and worked in Angola, Indonesia and Nigeria. The cultural sensitivity training he received from Chevron before being sent overseas was invaluable. This is something that Condor Petroleum also tries to impart to its employees before they head overseas—knowledge, cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Once you're at your destination, Streu adds, it's important to become involved in the local community and to get to know the people.

"Make an effort to learn the language—you tend to be more warmly regarded if you are at least trying to learn the language," he explains. "Make sure you show



respect for the country and the people you meet. Everybody has a different way of life, and trying to understand and embrace theirs is important.”

Financial incentives are one of the rewards for working overseas, but there are many others. For his part, Streu has been delighted with the opportunities he’s had to travel and learn about a wide variety of cultures.

“Certainly, for any young CADE engineer thinking about going overseas, it’s an excellent opportunity for career growth, both from a personal and from a career standpoint,” he says. “You have to learn to adapt and use the tools that are available—it breeds ingenuity. It really takes your abilities to the next level.”

Bill Hatcher, Condor Petroleum’s senior vice-president, operations, has worked in a variety of places throughout the course of his career, including Kazakhstan, Trinidad, Turkmenistan and Nigeria. What Hatcher, who is originally from the United States,

really appreciates is the opportunity to work with, and become friends with, people from around the world—and in so doing, to broaden his global perspective.

Cultural awareness is critical to success when doing business overseas, Hatcher says. “You absolutely have to have local knowledge and local relationships—knowing how who to talk to and what doors need to be opened. And, what it takes to be successful in one environment is going to be vastly different in another environment.”

Cultural awareness training can make a significant difference in helping people understand those who see the world in a different way. In 2005, when Hatcher was working for an independent Canadian oil company operating in partnership with China National Petroleum Company International and working with western, Kazakh and Chinese employees, “we had several significant problems that were all

what you would call

‘soft’ problems—none were technical problems,” he recalls.

They ended up bringing in a cultural awareness trainer to help clarify the situation, and come up with possible solutions to the cultural misunderstandings.

“The purpose of the training was by no means to get an American or a Canadian to think like a Chinese or a Kazakh, or change their core values in any way,” Hatcher explains. “Rather, it was to expand one’s perceptions, and understand that there are others in this world [who] look at problems through a different set of paradigms than you might, in order to help you work with others and be able to come to a common resolution.”

CADE president John Garden also emphasizes the importance of sensitivity to other ways of thinking about the world and other approaches to getting things done. ►



Photo: Bill Hatcher

Condor Petroleum president Don Streu (right) with Abdu Abishev, general director, at a Zharkamys oil property in Kazakhstan, near a well drilled by the Soviets in 1940.



Photo: Condor Petroleum

Bill Hatcher, Condor Petroleum's senior vice-president, operations, during recent well test operations on the company's Marsel block in Kazakhstan.

"You've got to understand their way of thinking, and what their motivations are for doing what they do," says Garden, who is Albania's drilling manager for Bankers Petroleum, a Calgary-based oil and gas exploration and production company focused on large oil and gas reserves in Albania. "You've got to ask

the right questions. And what I've found in the past is that talking louder doesn't help. Yelling and screaming doesn't help—the locals aren't deaf; they don't understand English. I think the key is having an open mind."

For Bankers, the largest onshore driller in Europe, the Albanian project has been very

Advice from a veteran

"When you work internationally, it's very important to be trusted in the country where you work and to be recognized for what you do," says CADE student member Serik Abdrazakov, who is originally from Kazakhstan and has worked in Kazakhstan, the United Kingdom and Canada.

"It's very important to have an excellent work ethic. I also think that you need good soft skills. You have to be able to talk with and understand people of different backgrounds and cultures, be a quick learner, be very respectful and understanding of their culture and traditions, and know their history as well—the way the country evolved and how the culture developed. If you know all this, plus you are a good professional, this is the key to being known and trusted in that country and to being successful internationally."

straightforward. The company, which drilled 80 horizontal wells in Albania in the last 18 months, plans to drill another 80-90 wells in 2011, a large percentage of them horizontal.

"Bankers has taken mainly Canadian companies over to Albania to work for us, with Canadian directional experience on horizontal wells," Garden says. "Take that experience internationally, and there are fewer pitfalls. Canadian companies have the experience, so the learning curve isn't as steep."

Condor Petroleum's Hatcher also praises the experience that Canadian companies bring to the job.

"The harsh environments that Canadians have to operate in create quite an entrepreneurial and creative spirit that I think is marketable globally." ■