



energy
optimism.
and *Attitude*

MEL KASSIAN • • •

DURING THE SIX YEARS THAT MEL KASSIAN, '83 BCOM, HAS BEEN A PART OF REGENT ENERGY GROUP LTD., **OIL PRICES HAVE HIT RECORD HIGHS AND LOWS**, THE ECONOMY HAS TANKED, THE OIL SANDS HAVE BEEN DECRIED AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCOURGE, AND THE ALBERTA GOVERNMENT INFURIATED AND STALLED THE ENERGY SECTOR WHEN IT RESTRUCTURED ROYALTY RATES.



And yet Mel, an investor, director and, since March 2009, President of Regent, remains happy and optimistic.

“If you asked me when I was in university what kind of job I would like to do, this is it,” he says. “I work with some great people and I enjoy what I do very much.”

Before you write off the happily married father of four as delusional, consider the reasons he’s so upbeat: helping to run Regent at its corporate office in Nisku is “the full meal deal,” he says. “I get to invest my time in areas that require strategy, promote growth, direct change, and value a healthy work place. As an owner, there’s the benefit in all that and seeing your baby grow, so to speak.”

Regent specializes in sand control, providing products, technology, and strategies to optimize heavy oil extraction from the ground. Last year, it was a runnerup for the World Oil Best Completion Technology Award.

Domestic projects on tap for 2010 include work with Encana, Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Suncor, Petro-Canada, Imperial Oil, and Husky. Internationally, in 2008, the company opened a facility in Oman and, in 2009, began negotiating deals in Brazil, China, Colombia, Kuwait, Mexico, and Qatar.

Mel travels to the international locations when needed. He was in Oman when the national soccer team beat neighbouring Saudi Arabia in the Gulf Cup final. "While celebrations were on, the Sultan of Oman issued a Royal Decree giving the entire country a day off the next day," he says, proposing the possibility that the Canadian government should consider doing the same the next time a home team wins the Stanley Cup.

Until travelling to Oman, Mel had never visited the Middle East. Between that region and Mexico, where Regent will open a facility in 2011, he's spending a lot of time in pleasant climates. "I guess I like warm weather and the beach so it's only fitting that I have a career in sand (control)," he jokes.

That wasn't exactly what he had in mind when he enrolled at the U of A in the late 1970s. He majored in accounting and finance because he knew he wanted to go into business. His interest was sparked growing up in Vegreville where his father put him to work in the family's clothing store. When Dad went to the cottage in the summer, Mel and his brothers and a sister would take over.

"It was there that I realized I enjoyed business," he says. "I truly am an entrepreneur at heart."

Mel spent his first few post-graduate years working for a public accounting firm before moving to PCL where he built his skill set and confidence. After nine years at PCL, he joined a down-hole instrumentation company that he invested in. The start-up company, now called Zedi Inc., went on to become very successful for Mel and the industry.

"Making the jump from being an employee to being an executive was really the result of having excellent mentors along the way," he says. It helped, too, that everywhere he worked he was exposed to technology, engineering, product services, and strong leadership.

At Regent, strong leadership is a shared role. Mel has only the highest praise for his partners, fellow owners Bill Bowlen and Laurie Venning.

"Bill is the backstop and Laurie is the guy on the ground. Our combination has worked really well as an ownership group. We all have different skill sets, but, being from the same industry, has certainly helped. We all understand the business and we've been through the cycles."

Mel's advice to current business students is to build relationships. "I just can't say enough about having good peers and excellent mentors because that's how you make the leap, that's how you get your confidence. It will help you to answer the question, 'do I have what it takes?' You don't just get that right from the start. You may think so, but it doesn't happen overnight."

He also recommends striving for balance. Despite the pressures of helping to run a multi-national company, Mel does his best to keep his hours to 40 to 50 a week. He doesn't go on every business trip. Last year, he joined the Windemere Golf Club and, during the fall of 2009, a legends soccer team in Sherwood Park where he and his family share their quarters with a dog, cat, hedgehog, chameleon, and bunny.

"I enjoy what I do, but I have a beautiful family and I do get involved in the community," he says. "There's a lot more in my life than just work, and I'm very thankful for that."

ON THE ROAD TO SUCCESS



"I LOVE HORSEPOWER AND DIFFERENT MODES OF TRANSPORTATION. I GOT A CHANCE TO RIP AROUND IN THAT CAR, RACING AND STUFF, JUST WEST OF HERE.

THAT WAS IN THE FALL, IN SEPTEMBER. WE'VE DONE THAT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AS WELL.