

# Ron Stovash

## Hitting the High Notes of a Forty Year Career

“I believe my career in the coal industry started the day I was born. Obviously, I did not know that then, but my family genes and history would eventually lead me to an exciting and rewarding life in coal mining.” Ron Stovash was born in Canonsburg Hospital in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, but his parent’s home was actually in Coverdale, Pennsylvania, now part of Bethel Park in the South Hills area of Pittsburgh. Coverdale was a small company mining community that supported the Pittsburgh Terminal No. 8 Mine that opened in 1919. The mine, commonly known as the Coverdale Mine, operated until 1948.

Ron’s grandfather was born in 1880 and started his mining career at the age of 8, hand loading coal with his father in Krakow, Poland. In 1906, in pursuit of a better life, he boarded a ship bound for the United States. He continued his mining

career throughout Western Pennsylvania and finally settled in Coverdale. Ron’s grandfather was a union worker, not a management representative, who became a Member of the Pittsburgh Coal Mining Institute in 1925, the same year the Institute was organized. Ron’s father started his mining career in the Coverdale Mine at the age of 15, hand loading with his father just as his father had done.

Ron points out that a very interesting fact about Coverdale occurred on March 11, 1927 as reported in the New York Times. The first armored car robbery in U.S. history took place when a Brinks truck heading towards the Coverdale Mine about a mile away was attacked. Paul Jaworski and his “Flatheads” gang destroyed the road with dynamite to steal the mine payroll of \$104,250 and then lose the many pursuing posses.

Ron with recording artist Bobby Vinton



On Main Street in Coverdale, Bethel Park, there is a granite monument with the names of the original families of Coverdale and a picture of the mine building, to honor all those who started the community and worked at the mine. “I am proud that my family namesake is inscribed there to memorialize our family connection to the coal industry and the miners themselves.”

### Prelude to a Career in Coal

In 1957, while at the Allegheny County Fair in South Park outside of Pittsburgh, Ron’s parents signed him up to take accordion lessons. “What boy at the age of nine wanted to play the accordion?” However, after beginning to play, Ron acquired a real passion for the accordion. At his grandfather’s house on every major holiday, he was required to play his accordion as his grandfather played the violin, his father the washtub bass, his uncle the banjo, another the washboard, another the spoons, as the adults drank Iron City or Duquesne Beer and Four Roses Whiskey. He entertained throughout the Pittsburgh area, initially for charitable organizations, nursing homes, and private functions. Later, after his father took up the drums, they formed a band and played for hundreds of weddings, dances, clubs, organizations, and special events.

The band, named the “Deltones”, played for Pittsburgh Coal, Harmar Coal, and Mathies Coal Companies dances at such places as the Oakmont County Club. It was at one of the Consolidation Coal and Pittsburgh Coal Companies Christmas lunches that Ron’s brother Bob, who at that time was an accountant with the Pittsburgh Coal Company Division of Consolidation Coal, introduced him to Dave Werner, the President of the Pittsburgh Coal Company Division. “Bob asked Dave to give me a summer job as I was in my first year of electrical engineering at the University of Pittsburgh. Dave said if I wanted to be a shiny-ass engineer, there was no job available, but if I wanted to work underground as an hourly coal miner, I had a job. It was 1966



and seemed like a great opportunity since my genes, family roots, growing up in a coal patch, playing my accordion for various coal company functions, and maybe most of all, the challenge, passion, and respect I acquired over the years for coal mining and its people, inspired me – I accepted.”

### Orchestrating a Harmonious Life

The following summer, Ron started his formal coal career at the Montour #4 Mine of the Pittsburgh Coal Company Division as an UMW hourly worker. “I don’t think my parents really wanted me to go underground and work in the mines at that time. The underground mining method employed was conventional mining utilizing drilling and airdox

blasting. There were still a lot of accidents and fatalities in the industry. Remember, this was well before the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969.”

Ron continued working summers and holidays underground at the mines while attending college and upon graduation from Pitt with a degree in Electrical Engineering, accepted a full-time position with Consol as a production engineer at the Renton Mine near Monroeville, PA. Ron progressed through numerous positions from section foreman, project engineer, to engineering assistant to the Senior Vice President of Consol. In 1974, at the request of Joe Kristoff, then President of the Pittsburgh Coal Company Division, he went to the Westland Mine as a shift foreman, put the new longwall in service as longwall coordinator, and became General Assistant Mine Foreman. In 1977, Ron was promoted to Superintendent of the Laurel Mine in Somerset County, Pennsylvania and in 1979, General Superintendent of the Shoemaker Mine near Wheeling, West Virginia. “I remember accepting the job at Shoemaker on a Monday in the office of President & CEO Bobby Brown. He ask me when I could start and I said the following Monday. He said you need to start tomorrow. I never went back to my home or office in Somerset, Pennsylvania ever again after leaving his office. I went directly to Wheeling, West Virginia.” Ron recalls the numerous work stoppages, strikes, and violence that faced the coal industry during the ‘70’s. “There were times when I thought I would get beat up or shot trying to cross a picket line at one of the mines – it was scary. Tensions were very tough between management and the UMW. The entire industry has come a very long, needed,



Paul Jaworski and his “Flatheads” gang destroyed the road with dynamite to steal the mine payroll of \$104,250 and then lose the many pursuing posses.

and positive way since then.”

After advancing to the position of Technical Assistant to the Vice President – Moundsville Operations, Ron attended the Executive Management Program at the University of Illinois. Ron was promoted in 1987 to Vice President – Ohio Operations that included the newly acquired assets of the Quarto Mining Company from North American Coal Company. Responsibilities included CONSOL’s underground and surface mines in eastern Ohio with 135 and 105 cubic yard stripping shovels. Ron commented, “This was a unique experience to be associated with these extremely large surface mining machines that had a long and outstanding history in CONSOL.”

### On Tour with CONSOL

In 1990, Ron was transferred to head the Fairmont Operations in West Virginia, and later was added the responsibilities for the Blacksville Operations and the Potomac Operations acquired from Island Creek Coal Company. In 1996, Ron was named Vice President – Northern West Virginia Operations with responsibilities for eight underground coal mines, preparation plants, related facilities, and staff departments. “During my career, I have seen the transition from conventional mining to continuous mining in the ‘60’s, the surge of longwall mining with shields and shearers versus chocks and plows in the ‘70’s, increased automation and the move to low-sulphur coal in the ‘80’s, advanced technology, larger horsepower equipment, and conversion from rail to belt haulage in the ‘90’s.”

Then in 1999, CONSOL Energy President & CEO, Brett Harvey, asked Ron to transfer to the marketing department. “This was a tough move for me at that time. I had spent roughly 32 years in operations and liked that side of the business. I felt comfortable. But, in the end, I did what Brett asked of me and transferred to Vice President – Marketing Services.” In his new capacity, Ron had responsibilities for distribution, transportation, contact administration, technical marketing services, river division, docks, and terminals. With Ron’s role for overseeing CONSOL’s river operations and terminals, he was a member of the United States Marine Transportation System National Advisory Council and was appointed by the Secretary of the



Coal mining runs deep in the Stovash family, Ron’s grandfather (left) started mining at the age of eight, hand loading coal with his father in Poland.

Army to serve on the United States Inland Waterway Board. It was during this time that Ron helped form the Eastern Coal Transportation Association (ECTA) that later merged with the Western Coal Transportation Association to become the present day National Coal Transportation Association (NCTA). “This was an evolving time for the coal companies’ transportation sectors. We in the East, at that time, needed a stronger transportation voice, especially with the railroads and the Surface Transportation Board (STB). The ECTA, with the help of the other founding members, made this happen. However, we in the ECTA quickly realized that if we were going to have a bigger voice, we needed to join with the WCTA. I am very proud to have been part of that process and a director of the NCTA. Some of the friendships I have

made in those organizations I still consider my dear friends today. That is why I still participate at times in various meetings of the organization.” Later, while working under Pete Lilly, CONSOL Energy’s Chief Operating Officer, Ron’s responsibilities in the marketing department expanded to include international, domestic metallurgical, US Southeast, and Central Appalachian sales as Vice President – Sales & Marketing. Shortly thereafter he also assumed operating responsibilities for Central Appalachia and CONSOL’s joint venture mine in Australia when promoted to Senior Vice President.

Ron was promoted in 2005 to Senior Vice President – Planning and Administration with responsibility for corporate planning, engineering, exploration, environmental affairs, closed

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- Ron Stovash



Ron with Ben Statler at the Kentucky Derby



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operations, material and supply chain management, and research and development. Here he was directly responsible for initiating and negotiating three separate complex and difficult acquisitions. “The Marrowbone joint venture acquisition through bankruptcy was extremely complicated and included a very significant number of parties. There were many times that I thought the deal would never be consummated, but persistence prevailed. The start-up of the Miller Creek Complex was a major milestone for CONSOL after many years of leasing the reserves. And finally, the acquisition of Mon-River Towing proved to be a significant value to CONSOL Energy’s river division operations.” He participated at the World Coal Institute (WCI) meetings in Brussels, Belgium and the International Energy Agency (IEB-CIAB) meetings in Paris, France. “The international exposure at these meetings gave me a real global perspective of the worldwide coal industry challenges.”

In 2006, Ron returned back to mining as Senior Vice President – Coal Operations and serving as CONSOL’s management representative in three joint mining ventures. He was directly responsible for initiating two additional complex joint venture partnerships, one in Pennsylvania and one in the West.

In January 2007, Ron retired from CONSOL Energy after 39½ years of

service. “When I first started my career with Consolidation Coal Company, retirement seemed so far in the future that I could not imagine how far, but after I retired, it seemed as though I had just started yesterday. I have been very fortunate to work with a dedicated and outstanding group of miners, management, and executives over the years at CONSOL.”

### What Retirement? Encore!

Within a week of Ron’s retirement, a former CONSOL executive and friend, Ben Statler, asked Ron to become the President & CEO of PinnOak Resources, the company Ben acquired from US Steel Mining. “I had no future plans when I retired from CONSOL Energy and the opportunity to be a President & CEO of a coal mining company was the epitome of my coal mining career. So I accepted the position. It was a rewarding and exciting position at PinnOak.” By mid summer 2007, Cleveland Cliffs, now Cliffs Natural Resources had an offer to purchase PinnOak Resources. Ron stayed on with Cleveland Cliffs after the purchase and through the integration of PinnOak into Cleveland Cliffs. Then at the end of November 2007, Ron retired again with over 40 years of experience. “I had a unique opportunity to work for an iron ore and coal mining company under Chairman, President & CEO Joe Carrabba.

Along with the various state coal associations and related organizations that Ron served on, he also was appointed by two governors to the West Virginia Public Energy Authority and elected Chairman, served as a member and Vice Chairman of the Electrical Engineering Visiting Committee at the University of Pittsburgh, a member of the Mining Engineering Visiting Committee at West Virginia University, a member of the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers (AIME), and Society of Mining Engineers (SME). In 2009, Ron was elected a Distinguished Alumni of the University of Pittsburgh Swanson School of Engineering and is listed in Who’s Who for demonstrated leadership and industry achievement.

Ron not only served his industry, but his community as well. He continues to serve as a trustee and Vice President of the Board of the West Virginia Public Theatre and has received a number of philanthropic awards for his outstanding service, a member of the Board of the Greater Morgantown Charitable Trust, a member of the Board of Directors of the Monongalia Health System and General Hospital, and a member and Secretary/Treasurer of The Old Timers Club in the coal industry. In addition, Ron is a member of a number of committees for all of these Boards. “I am grateful for all the opportunities I have had in my

working career and wanted to give something back, my leadership and managerial expertise, to the community and the people it serves.”

After a 2009 meeting with a West Virginia Congressman and Senator in Washington, DC, Ron contemplated running for the US House of Representatives. “It was very obvious to me that both of these individuals were not in touch with the majority of the views of the people I knew in North Central West Virginia. I had a rather heated debate with both the Senator and the Congressman on the issues of healthcare and cap and trade. It was my impression that they were supporting the views of their own political party and their own political career, versus the views of their constituents who elected them to office. As a result, I decided to run for the US Congress to unseat the incumbent. After many lengthy discussions with my wife Stephanie concerning how nasty political races are, I decided not to run, but to support a candidate to unseat the incumbent. In the end, the incumbent was defeated and we are better off in our representation and government.”



Ron and Stephanie Stovash

### The Music Plays On

Shortly after Ron became a Superintendent, he retired from his musical career and his band. “I thought that it was not becoming of a Consol Superintendent to be performing out in clubs and other functions. Although, from the time I

started playing the accordion, I always wanted to take Myron Florence’s place on the Lawrence Welk Show. It was not just because I had a crush on the Lennon Sisters, anyone of them for that matter, but it was because I truly loved playing and entertaining with the accordion. I did get the next best thing, performing with Bobby Vinton twice, once with the West Virginia Symphony, and performing at the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the West Virginia Public Theatre starring Tony Orlando. This was truly a highlight of my musical career.” From time to time, Ron still entertains, many times with his wife Stephanie who dances in a senior dance tap group, *The String of Pearls*, at various nursing and retirement homes, Veterans Hospital, and other community and charitable functions. *The String of Pearls* have nicknamed Ron their “Pearl Daddy”. “It’s like coal mining, it is in your genes and family history, and it is hard to give it up.”

“I owe a lot to my parents and my two brothers who guided and helped mold me, including those first Consol managers and executives who further defined my work ethics and leadership. My

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brother Bob, who first introduced me to get my first job, worked for CONSOL Energy for 40 years and finished his career as a Vice President in the sales department. We had the opportunity to work together for a few years when I first moved to the sales department. That was a memorable experience."

Ron and his wife Stephanie still live in Morgantown, West Virginia and since last year, purchased a second home in Naples, Florida where they spend most of their extra time. Stephanie also had a connection to the coal industry. Her parents started Mt. State Bit Service Company that sold surface drilling bits to the mining industry and later expanded to perform the drilling and blasting for mining and construction companies throughout six states. Stephanie and her brother continued managing Mt. State Bit Service after their parent's retirement until the company was sold in 2007 to an international drilling and explosive company. Ron's children Kim and Ronnie, and Kim's husband Michael, all work for CONSOL Energy, so the coal family history lives on. Ron and Stephanie have two grandsons and with Ronnie's wife Jean expecting, they are looking forward to a third grandchild in January. "I am proud of the fact that my kids all got jobs on their own; I did not intervene for them. I realize that my brother Bob, myself, and the Stovash name and reputation helped, just like all the sons and daughters of miners and supervisors that I gave an opportunity to work at CONSOL because of the work history of their father or mother."

Ron still keeps in contact and socializes with many of his life long friends from the coal industry. "The relationships I made throughout my coal industry career are very much a part of my extended family." Much of that is made possible through the various organizations, like the NCTA, and clubs that many of his active and retired coal colleagues participate. Last year, Ron gave a speech at the Denver Meeting of the NCTA and was able to see many old friends. Ron actively stays up to date on the coal industry and is doing a limited amount of work and consulting. "I believe the challenges the coal industry had when I first started in 1967, and those during my nearly 41 year active career, were as severe and threatening as those the industry faces today. I am confident, based on the industry's past performance and organizations like the NCTA, the coal industry will solve those challenges in the future." ▲

