

CHARLIE MCNEIL

In His DNA

By: Caroline Riley

He wore an unassuming clementine-orange button down shirt, tucked into his khaki slacks; when he pushed open the lobby's towering glass door to greet me, I was struck by the juxtaposition; but that is Charlie McNeil: a humble man amidst a glimmering empire.

"Caroline?" He asked jovially, extending a tanned hand towards mine. A door swung open to reveal a sun-lit room — his office — befit with shimmering natural rocks, lucky Chinese dragon heads and floor-to-ceiling glass windows, showcasing Denver's skyline.

"It's hard to believe how time has gotten away," McNeil said, referencing his 47-year career. "I started here in Denver with Consol Energy [formerly Consolidation Coal]. We worked on various

coal mining projects throughout the Western United States, from Canada on down to New Mexico. I was only here six months when they transferred me to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the corporate office. We actually built a house [in Denver] on Monaco and Hampden, but we never got to move in." In Pittsburgh, McNeil worked with Gene Samples, the VP of Consol and the future CEO of Arch Coal, on three underground coal-mines in the upper pan-handle of West Virginia and three coal mines in the Western US and Canada.

Next, McNeil was transferred to Bismarck, North Dakota: "I drove about an hour a day up north, and I was project manager of expanding the Glenharold Mine. We brought in a dragline which we moved out of Canada and got it running right before the UMWA strike that year. We added all the other equipment to get it from 1.3 million tons a year up to 4 million tons a year. And from that, I became general foreman of the mine." Consol transferred McNeil back to the Pittsburgh headquarters for corporate planning than

Rainbow Bridge at Lake Powell with family



to West Virginia where he worked at the Ireland, Shoemaker and McElroy Mines as the assistant to the president of the division. "Just those mines alone had 2000 employees working underground every day. We developed the first longwall mine for Consol so it was really good hands-on experience. It was a great trajectory, but being a Colorado native, we had to get west. The mountains, sun and skiing pulled me back."

McNeil, born in Greeley, Colorado moved to Estes Park when he was six, growing up in "beautiful small-town living." "I was outdoors a lot, scouting, camping, skiing. I worked for Rocky Mountain National Park for three summers so I drove up Trail Ridge road every day." In his graduating class of 38, McNeil was Student Body President and an Eagle Scout. A natural STEM student, McNeil majored, at first, in physics at the Colorado School of Mines. However, once introduced to mining, McNeil switched, staying an extra semester to receive his Bachelors of Science degree in Mining Engineering in 1971. "I think, in an economy, you either mine it or grow it; that's where the basis of an economy begins. I enjoy producing energy today that powers our country."

At Mines, he, again, served as Student Body President: "We had all the Vietnam war and campus riots going on at that time so I worked a lot



President of Denver Boy Scout Council

with the president of the school but also with other organizations that were trying to get students to settle down," McNeil recounted. "I thought I might want to run for political office to help direct the country, but I was so involved with my career and business, I never got off that track to pursue politics. When you have financial commitments and personal wealth on the line, you've got to pay attention. If I hadn't had my own business, I might've taken a try at that," McNeil said with a chuckle. McNeil was honored with the Mines Distinguished Achievement Medal in 1998, and he currently serves on the Foundation Board of Governors, the President's Council and the Guggenheim Society. He was appointed by Governor Hickenlooper to serve on the Board of Trustees. He also serves on the National Advisory Council of the Marriott School of Business at Brigham Young University.

Most notably, during his time at Mines, McNeil met his wife of 47 years, Judy: "When I went to Mines, it was probably 7 or 8% women, you know. So, you had to find your dates outside of the girls at Mines. I met her at a party — she went to University of Northern Colorado— and we dated for a year and a half, then got married," McNeil said, his face cracking into a sheepish grin at the mention of her name. "She's very outgoing, very personable and is always volunteering for something. She gets out there, rolls up her sleeves and serves people."

Judy, a stay-at-home mom and fellow Colorado native, raised their three kids, Ryan, Travis and Kealey. Currently, Judy heavily supports the Guild for the Barbara Davis Center Children's Diabetes Foundation and served as the Guild President in 2011. She joins Charlie in keeping up with their 10 grandchildren, "making the rounds to soccer games, basketball games, that kind of thing."

With family ties in Colorado, the McNeils conceded to the pull of home. McNeil left Consol to return back west. He ultimately became CEO of Kaiser Coal Corporation, overseeing coal mining operations in Utah, New Mexico and Colorado. When parent Kaiser Steel went into bankruptcy and the company was



Charlie and Judy

sold off, he had the dilemma of going back east where he had other coal company offers or "to take a leap of faith and do his [own] thing." After doing independent consulting work for a short period, he got a call from Southwestern Public Service Company (now a subsidiary of Xcel Energy). They said, "We ended up with a purchase and sale agreement to acquire TUCO back, fold it in, and get Cabet Corporation out of there, but the PUC would not approve the transaction. If we assigned our purchase and sale agreement to you, do you think you can put together acquiring TUCO?" and I said, "Sure, why not?" And here, 22 years later, I'm still doing it," McNeil said of his first big entrepreneurial endeavor, his long coal trains still chugging along the railroads through Denver along the Santa Fe Highway. Spurring from his initial success, McNeil would later develop 15 company start-ups inside and outside of the coal business: "I'm a risk-taker. I've done well, but I've also taken some good losses along the way. Fortunately, my winnings exceed my losses so it's been very rewarding. But to be an entrepreneur, by definition, you have to be a risk-taker, have the stamina or stomach or whatever you want to call it to take those risks. So I'm rolling the dice. That's the spirit of America — the ability to try and succeed."

McNeil founded and continues to serve as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of NexGen Resources Corporation, a natural resources company focusing on coal, oil, gas and real estate development. After acquiring TUCO, McNeil developed Section 29 Synthetic Fuel Facilities in West Virginia. He also was a co-founder of Trident Exploration, the first company to commercialize coal bed methane development in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, Canada. He later formed NexGen Oil & Gas to pursue

horizontal drilling and fracking of shale formations in Colorado, Wyoming and North Dakota.

Through NexGen, McNeil ultimately developed clean coal technology that falls under the Section 45 Tax Credit; he still maintains 25 facilities across the country reducing NOx and Mercury emissions from coal fired power plants. In McNeil's career, SOx, NOx, Mercury and PM10 emissions have been lessened by approximately 90%: "NexGen stands for developing the next generation of energy and natural resources," McNeil said, setting his silver-rimmed reading glasses on the dark mahogany desk. "I like to say I'm always on the forefront of developing new things, on the fringes of the energy business to propel and carry it forward. I'm always working on the next generation — whatever that may be to sustain our economy, our lifestyle, everything we're about in this country and to keep freedom alive. I think the key to freedom is having reliable dependable energy."

Speaking faster, impassioned, McNeil continued: "I very much believe in coal. It's a very valuable condensed energy source. If it hadn't been for coal, oil and gas coming forth during the Industrial Revolution 100+ years ago, we wouldn't have the economy and standard of living we have today. There is a direct correlation between electricity and a population's standard of living; coal has really been the fuel that's powered growth over the last 100 years."

He addressed me by name in-between sentences, seemingly initiating me into the fight: "I think the key thing - the way I'm looking at it, Caroline — is we need to do all we can to get the CO2 levels down to natural gas [levels] in super critical plants. There is still a lot of Department

of Energy money being allocated to research so it's not a lost cause." McNeil was appointed by the Secretary of Energy, Rick Perry, as a Director of the National Coal Council. Its board advises the secretary on the kind of research needed to secure coal's future; in fact, he was preparing for a conference call the next day to discuss what's needed to sustain the coal-fired power plants across the United States.

"Some people ask, 'Why am I involved in politics?' and I say, '[For] all of us in our industry, if you aren't [involved], you're going to get crushed. You have to keep educating people and making sure the right regulations and legislations are put in place. I think all of us in the industry need to keep politically involved on a grassroots level, trying to get the right people elected. I don't think we can sit back and be idle. We need to be on the forefront.'"

McNeil spoke extensively about the need for public education: "I know there's a lot of aversion to coal. You know, coal's becoming a bad four-letter word. Even my grandkids say, 'Grandpa, you're involved in coal?' But they're getting it in the schools — it's hard. China is at over four billion tons of year in coal consumption, and here, in the US, we're back down from 1.1 billion tons a year to 750 million tons, the amount when I started in my career 47 years ago," he said with a sigh. "Education is the top priority - trying to convince everyone that coal and all the work we've done to clean it up over the years is still important.

Like I said, we've tackled



everything really well other than, now, the CO2 emissions — that's a really tough issue for us."

In addition to the National Coal Council, McNeil works with the Colorado Mining Association and is a member of the American Coal Council, Tau Beta Pi Engineering Society, American Energy Society, the Rocky Mountain Coal Mining Institute, the Western Energy Alliance, the Colorado Oil and Gas Association, and, of course, the National Coal Transportation Association. He's dedicated his career to cleaning up coal, bolstering education and arguing for correct policy: "I'm up for the fight, and I think all of us who have been in this industry as long as I have are up for the fight too. And it is a fight. It's a matter of educating people and getting them to understand that coal is an important resource to our economy and the viability of our country. The rest of the world will be using coal so why should we impoverish ourselves of its



Trip to Pyramids in Egypt

Campaign Function with President Trump

economic advantages when we have so much of it in the United States? It's so important to our economic competitiveness and base."

As for the future of coal, McNeil is hopeful, especially so with the Trump Administration in the White House: "My gut feeling is coal is still going to represent about 25% of our energy needs for electrical generation to provide stable base load generation and to back up the wind and solar and renewables that are out there."

Regarding the future of his company, NexGen, McNeil is keeping it within the family: "My two sons and my son-in-law work with me here on the business so it keeps all my 10 grandkids here in town — that's the way to do it. My oldest son, Ryan, is Vice President of Land in our NexGen Oil and Gas Group so he does all the land work — working with landowners and the federal government on leasing. My second oldest son, Travis, heads up our real estate division so he has his broker license. Clay, my son-in-law, is President and CFO — he's a really good financial guy— and I'm Chairman and CEO."

When I inquired about retirement, McNeil smiled: "I'll always be around as a mentor and a rain maker. But I want to get to the point where I don't need to be here every day." However, as I stared down his overwhelming resume on my lap, I sensed he wasn't prone to slowing down.

When he's not solving carbon sequestration conundrums or communicating with Congress, McNeil dedicates his spare time to helping others, alongside his wife. Charlie and Judy were honorees for the Arapahoe

House "Pillars of the Community," the Arapahoe House "Ruston Award," honorees for the 25th Anniversary Children's Diabetes Foundation "Carousel Ball," and Cherry Hill Village 2010 "Villagers of the Year." Charlie actively serves the Mountain States Employers Council Board, Craig Hospital Foundation Board, Common Sense Policy Roundtable Board, Arapahoe House for Substance Abuse Board, Sewall Childhood Development Center, Kempe Foundation for Abused Children, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, the Steamboat Institute Board and their church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints— their religious belief motivating much of their service efforts: "Serve your fellow man, your fellow human being. It's an important part of who we are. We very much believe [those down on their luck] are our brothers and sisters, spirit children of our Heavenly Father. We're all connected. I think it's important to know where we came from, why we're here and where we're going, you know?" McNeil said, twisting his wedding ring around his finger. Any leftover time is spent adventuring around the globe — Judy and Charlie have been to all seven continents and have itineraries in place for years to come.

Amidst the trinkets from business deals, international trips, and political run-ins, McNeil's office is littered with Boy Scout memorabilia. McNeil, an Eagle Scout and 15-year Executive Board Member, is President and Board of Trustee Member of the Denver Area Boy Scouts: "I really believe in the Scout Oath and the Scout Law; they are very powerful principles to follow in your life, and it sets you on a good footing. It says a lot about who you are at an early stage in life — your character, work ethic, who you are — and it stays with you the rest of your life," McNeil said proudly.

McNeil, in his teenage years, noticed an intrinsic need to accomplish and keep striving for goals: "I often wonder... what's in my DNA? What motivates me?" In response, over the last 15 years, McNeil has developed a creed, one he cleverly coins "The P.I.E Theory."

McNeil led me to the corner of his office towards a bookshelf overflowing with souvenirs of an extraordinary life. He gestured towards the humble bottom row, where 3 wooden plaques with golden plating rested

against the lacquered shelf. Each plaque was engraved with a word, Persistence, Integrity and Excellence, followed by a cursive quote from influential men: "It's something that I've developed over the years of what's important to me in my life, in business and in who I am," McNeil said. "You have to be persistent — just about the time you think you can't succeed and it's all over, that's when you've got to keep hanging in there. You got to have integrity or else people won't want to work with you. And excellence — you need to be excellent in everything you do." McNeil speaks to students at BYU, Mines and to his grand-children about the P.I.E Theory, sometimes adding an "S" to the acronym for "Service."

McNeil, for decades, has pursued patriotism, enterprise and generosity. And on that beautiful summer day, he stood in his sun-bathed penthouse atop a building across the street from Consol's original offices — right where he started 47 years prior. Tinkering with old-school mining collectibles, Charlie McNeil grinned and leaned in close, "Follow the P.I.E theory," he whispered. "That's my key to success. ▲"



ENGINEERING A BETTER WAY

Multi-discipline A/E firm providing planning and design services for:

- Bulk Materials Transportation
- Materials Handling, Transfer & Reclaim
- Unit Train Loading & Unloading
- Barge Loading & Unloading
- Dust Mitigation & Control
- Infrastructure



ST. LOUIS, MO
314.781.7770

SHERIDAN, WY
307.673.1644

www.cdgenineers.com



Trip to Antarctica