

Alpha Natural Resources rescue team captures national title

Group also earns National Skills Contest championship

By Clint Thomas
METRO STAFF

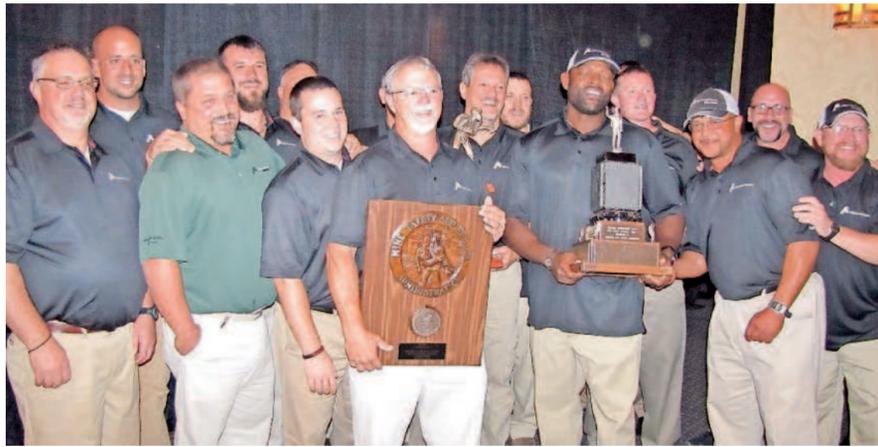
THE Alpha Natural Resources Southern West Virginia Mine Rescue team won the National Mine Rescue segment of the 2015 National Coal Mine Rescue, First Aid, Bench and Preshift Competition in Lexington, Kentucky, in mid-September.

Members of the winning team are Raleigh, Fayette and Boone county residents Mark Bolen, James Thomas, Scotty Kinder, Charles Brown, Mike Alexander, Dave Green, Grayson Cox, Adam Sipes, Brian Jarrell and trainer Jim Aurednik.

The victory was doubly rewarding for the Alpha Natural Resources mining professionals; it enabled the team to become the first in the United States to hold two national titles simultaneously: National Mine Rescue champions and National Skills Contest champions.

Sponsored by the National Mining Association, the 2015 National Coal Mine Rescue, First Aid, Bench and Preshift Competition was held at the Lexington Convention Center Sept. 14 through Sept. 17.

Sixty-five teams, with approximately 600 people participating in the team or individual competitions, vied for championship honors, hailing from West Virginia companies as well as those in



The Alpha Natural Resources Southern West Virginia Mine Rescue team celebrates its 2015 national championship award. Courtesy photo

Alabama, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia and Wyoming.

Alpha National Resources Team Captain Mark Bolen, of Naoma, said his group had only one "discount" or demerit during their two days of painstaking competition, ushering the team to the national title.

"It's set up like a simulated mine disaster," Bolen explained.

"It's a team event, with five guys in the 'field,' two guys in the command center and two 'patients,'" Bolen said. "We call it 'lock-up.' All 65 teams are locked into one area, with no electronic devices and no contact with anybody outside. Nobody has any information on what you're going to come

up against until you get on the contest field."

He said nine identical fields were constructed at the Lexington Convention Center, each field having its own set of judges.

"It's all governed by rules. It's based on how you'd have to address hazards to keep the team safe. It's not a spectator sport," Bolen said with a laugh.

Bolen said the Mine Rescue team also honed its competition skills by exploring and securing old, underground coal mines as part of their regular work assignments.

"Those have to be explored to make sure it's not going to cause a disaster when the new mine has to drive through it. We've done a couple of those in the past couple

of years. You'll encounter low oxygen, so we get apparatus training time in there," he explained.

Bolen said he has participated in national Mine Rescue competitions since 2009, although the competitions have been held nationally for more than a century.

Bolen added that about half of this year's 10-member championship team were involved with rescue efforts during the Upper Big Branch mining disaster in April 2010, when 29 of 31 miners were killed at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch coal mine in Montcoal.

"I actually had worked with a lot of those guys," Bolen said. "We think we're honoring them and their families with this achievement."



James Thomas (foreground) competes during the 2015 National Coal Mine Rescue, First Aid, Bench and Preshift Competition in Lexington, Kentucky. Courtesy photo



As a judge observes, Scotty Kinder, team captain Mark Bolen and Charles Brown collaborate on a Mine Rescue exercise. Courtesy photo

'A Century of Service' extracts, extols 100 years of WVONGA accomplishments in West Virginia

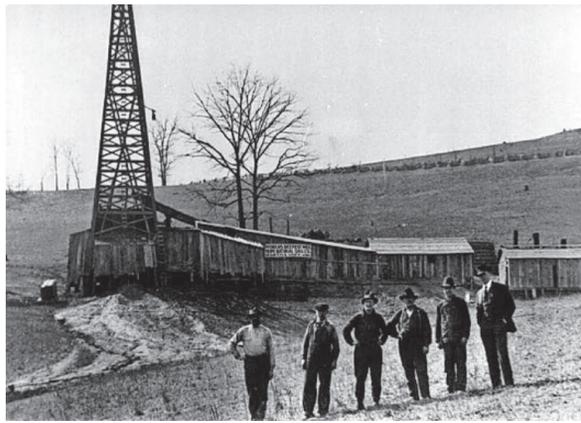
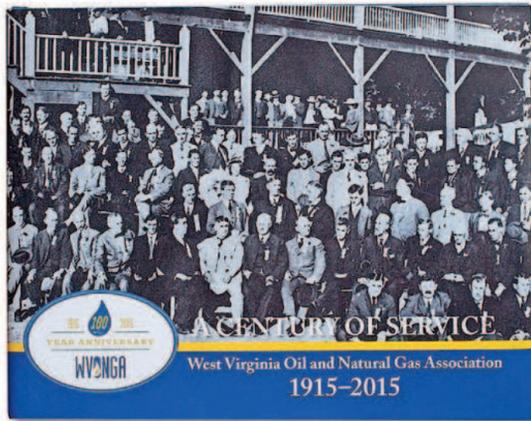
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IN 96 fact-filled, photograph-rich pages, 100 years of the West Virginia Oil and Natural Gas Association's economic and cultural impact and influence in the Mountain State -- and around the world -- are recounted and depicted in the book "A Century of Service."

The book was conceived, compiled and published to commemorate WVONGA's centennial anniversary in 2015. The wrap-around cover features a panoramic photograph of those who attended the first meeting of WVONGA at the Blennerhassett Hotel in Parkersburg in September 1915. The over-size book's article format is separated into quarter-century segments over the 20th and 21st centuries, with timelines designating major developments in the industry over that time.

Along with a comprehensive history of the oil and gas industry in the Mountain State, "A Century of Service" includes articles and illustrations on topics such as the West Virginia University School of Engineering, the West Virginia Geological Survey, the Hastings Extraction and Fractionation Plant, the Cabot Oil and Gas Corporation and the West Virginia Manufacturers Association, which also observed its centennial last year.

Benjamin A. Hardesty, a 30-year WVONGA Board member, past president of the organization and one of only four members of the WVON-



From "A Century of Service," this photograph shows the world's deepest gas well when it was completed in 1918. It was drilled 7,386 feet deep by the Hope Gas Co. approximately eight miles northeast of Clarksburg. A year later, the deepest well (7,579 feet) was drilled by Hope Gas Co. on a farm near Fairmont.

GA Hall of Fame, edited the meticulously researched and illustrated compendium.

"I was asked to be part of it; I have a lot of interest in oil and gas history, in West Virginia, in particular, and in

the United States, in general," Hardesty said from his Clarksburg home recently.

"I've read a lot of books with stories and photographs about the industry. I've also been on the Board of Direc-

tors of WVONGA for going on 31 years now. [WVONGA] Executive Director Corky DeMarco and some of the Executive Committee members asked me, and I took the lead to find a theme for the book and its timeline. I gathered information from various sources, with a lot of help.

"It was designed by New South Media," Hardesty said, "and it really was a team effort. A lot of people had a lot of different parts in the process. I like to say I was kind of the 'yearbook editor' for it."

"We decided to go in quarter-century increments. I had seen timelines used in other books, and we decided to use that on both in the industry and the world in the book."

"We're just really proud of our industry and proud of WVONGA, which started in 1915, the same year as the West Virginia Coal Association and the West Virginia Manufacturers Association," he said. "That's a statement that the state was really on the move then and the industries were gathering a lot of interest. At that time, we weren't in World War I yet, and a lot of companies were being formed in the oil and gas industries."

"For any organization to last a hundred years is a pretty remarkable achievement," Hardesty said. "We decided to put the book together and make it a coffee-table book with a lot of pictures. I was asked to do it, happy to be part of it and we got it done. We've given a lot of copies away to leaders in the state and libraries and universities."

Hardesty said that while "A Century of Service" recounts West Virginia's immense energy presence in the

About Ben Hardesty



Hardesty

A Shinnston native and West Virginia University (bachelor's degree) and George Washington University (master's degree) graduate, Hardesty is the owner of Alta Energy, which provides consulting work for the oil and natural gas industry in the Appalachian Basin. He was also president of Dominion Exploration and Production Inc. from 2007 to 2010 and president of Stonewall Gas Company from 1982 until 1995. Hardesty has also served as director and past president of the Independent Oil and Gas Association of West Virginia. He is a trustee and past chairman of the board of trustees for The Nature Conservancy of West Virginia and serves on the boards of directors of the West Virginia Roundtable, the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce and Huntington Banks of West Virginia. A Clarksburg resident, Hardesty was inducted into the WVONGA Hall of Fame in September 2015 and the WVU College of Business & Economics West Virginia Business Hall of Fame in 2009.

past century, it also gives a compelling perspective on the present and future of the industry.

"Think of it this way: About a hundred years ago, we were the leader in the nation in natural gas production; in 1900, we were the leader in oil production. A hundred years later, the technology we have allows for the drilling, production and extraction of natural gas from the Marcellus Shale and the Utica Shale and makes us the fourth in the nation and growing in natural gas production. The industry has always been here. The Marcellus Shale is 350 million years old; it's always been there, too.

"Due to what I call technology transfer," Hardesty said, "horizontal drilling -- from offshore to onshore -- is showing continuous improvements. Hydraulic fracturing in the state allows a combination of drilling and

fracturing. Our industry and the companies in our trade association have been part of that evolution of science and technology for a hundred years. The Appalachian Basin, which West Virginia is a part of, is the largest gas field and mass reservoir in the United States today and the second largest in the world. Our companies have been a part of that for over a hundred years.

"The future is bright. It's positive for the state, as far as employment opportunities and energy security. There are a lot of other opportunities for manufacturing, in turn, in the region, as well as cleaner sources of energy," Hardesty said.

"A Century of Service" costs \$69.95. To inquire about availability, contact Rebekah Hogue at WVONGA at rhogue@wvonga.com or 304-343-1609.

1915 Daily Mail article details West Virginia Coal Association origins

2015 marked the 100th anniversary of the establishment of three vital state organizations: the West Virginia Oil and Gas Association, the West Virginia Coal Association and the West Virginia Manufacturers Association. The following is a report on the beginnings of the WVCA at its first meeting in Huntington. The article was published in the April 30, 1915, edition of the Charleston Daily Mail.

Coal Men of State Are in Convention Practice of Selling Coal at Loss to Stimulate Market is Discussed.

Huntington is this week the mecca for scores of coal operators from various parts of the state. The meeting today

is that of the West Virginia Coal Association, that of The Splint and Gas Coal Association having been finished yesterday. The splint and gas association is separate and distinct from the other associations, it being composed of operators from the high volatile fields of the state, Fairmont, Western Maryland, Kanawha & Michigan, Thack-

er, Kanawha, Coal River, Elk and Guyana fields.

After the splint and gas operators organized, they decided to vest the government of the association in an executive committee. This committee was named as follows: T.E. Houston, Cincinnati; W.D. Ord, Landgraft, W.Va.; T.B. Davis, New York; John Laing, Charleston; D.T.

Evans, Cincinnati; Quinn Morton, Burnwell, W.Va.; J.W. Dawson, Charleston; John Winder, Columbus; A.W. Galoway, Elkins; J.C. McKinley, Wheeling; F.S. Landstreet, New York; and M.L. Hutchinson, Fairmont.

The committee will hold a meeting in the near future for the purpose of naming a chairman and secretary and perfecting other details of its organization.

The committee was also empowered to call a meeting of the newly organized association at any date it might see fit.

Fully one hundred coal

operators interested in coal developments in the state took part in the meeting. All were enthusiastic about the movement for an association and the organization was perfected with little impediment.

Many Speakers

Addresses were made at the meeting by Col. T. Vinson, of Huntington; Judge Frank Christian, of Lynchburg, Va., with investments in Paint Creek District; Samuel A. Taylor, of Pittsburgh, with interests in Coal River field; and D.T. Evans, of Cincinnati, interested in the Kanawha field.

All the speakers addressed themselves to the trade and market conditions, both domestic and foreign. The general conclusion was that the high volatile operators of West Virginia are selling coal below the cost of production and will ultimately end in bankruptcy, unless they strive for better conditions.

The meeting was called to order and presided over by Col. C.E. Dana, of Cincinnati, who is interested in the Otto Marmet Coal Co., with operations at Raymond City in Kanawha County. A.H. Land, of Barboursville, acted as secretary.