

## New Initiative Marks PR Effort In Texas

By Pat French

HOUSTON—Energy education programs in oil producing states across the nation have been increasingly effective as they have become more substantive.

Like those other state programs, the Texas Foundation for Energy Education also has made a major effort to ensure that its program reflects a comprehensive approach as it works toward changing public perceptions.

The foundation, therefore, is pleased to announce that it is in the process of adding another important initiative that will focus specifically on improving community relations, and that it also has completed constructing its interactive Web site ([www.foundationforenergyeducation.org](http://www.foundationforenergyeducation.org)).

The new program, "The Citizen Partnership," will focus on building better community relations for the Texas oil and gas industry by providing a special communications link with communities impacted by oil and gas operations. It will be introduced through press conferences in Houston, Dallas, Tyler, Austin, San Antonio, Midland, Corpus Christi and Amarillo, Tx.

As a "public service," the program's goal is to become a widespread resource for factual information about oil and natural gas drilling and production in Texas. It will provide the public (through the Internet) with an extensive range of information dealing with such issues as drilling, leasing, pipelines, safety, the environment, etc.

Building such a bridge has become vitally important. Legislators vote the views of their constituents, and given the

correlation between public attitudes and public policy, an industry under attack can expect to see legislation and regulation that reflects those grievances.

### Problem Prevention

In Texas, more so than in many producing states, the nature of the industry requires it to operate in local communities. If operations generate conflict, the industry cannot simply "set up shop" elsewhere; it must either resolve the issue or abandon the prospect.

Drilling operations can have a disruptive impact on local communities, and it is critical that the industry proactively address any questions or concerns. The Foundation for Energy Education plans to assume that role by implementing this important new community relations program.

In effect, this initiative will focus on "problem prevention" through dialogue, and statewide advertising will actively encourage Texans to participate. The foundation's Web site, which will have interactive capabilities to maximize its effectiveness, will provide the communications format.

A successful program could resolve issues that, if not addressed, might otherwise escalate into potential conflicts between communities and our industry.

The stakes are high. Failure to communicate effectively could result, for example, in restrictive city ordinances that would seriously impact the industry's ability to access oil and natural gas resources.

This program will supplement the foundation's other energy education initiatives, which focus on:

- Educating the public through state-

wide media campaigns ("New Perspectives for a Stronger Energy Future");

- Educating our school children ("The Facts About Oil and Gas") in partnership with the Offshore Energy Center; and

- Promoting the benefits of our state's abundant natural gas reserves ("The Natural Gas Advantage").

### Media Campaign

The goal of the foundation's media campaign is to fundamentally change the public's perception of the oil and gas industry. This is being accomplished by conducting systematic media campaigns across the state using a mix that includes radio (30- and 60-second spots) on targeted news and prime programming, supplemented with newspaper support.

Because the success of these campaigns can be determined only by the results they produce—by their ability to shape public opinion—heavy emphasis is put on "measurability." Using empirical data, public opinion is measured before (baseline study) and after (post-wave study) the advertising phase to determine its success in repositioning public attitudes.

The results of media campaigns in East Texas, the Texas Panhandle, and West Central Texas have clearly shown that it is possible to change public attitudes toward the oil and gas industry.

With a demonstrated track record, the foundation now plans to build on that success by conducting two more campaigns this year in other media markets. The next will be launched in the South Coast area and will include Corpus Christi, Kingsville, Alice, Robstown and Refugio, Tx.

This year's final campaign will be conducted in East-Central Texas and will include a combination of the Waco/Temple and Bryan/College Station markets. Major cities will include Waco, Temple, Killeen, Gatesville, Bryan, College Station, Prairie View and Brenham, Tx.

### Students And Gas

The foundation also is focusing on school education by bringing the facts about oil and gas into Texas classrooms. With serious workforce issues looming, the importance of this effort cannot be over emphasized.

Specifically, the Foundation for Energy Education has formed a strategic partnership with the highly respected Offshore Energy Center to promote its student education outreach programs across the state. Through teacher workshops, traveling exhibits and exciting curriculum materials, the industry is presented in a way that stimulates the imaginations of today's students.

In addition, the foundation is promoting the use of natural gas in Texas. This program is an effort to communicate the many advantages of natural gas as a solution to our energy and environmental challenges. Texas' natural gas production has far surpassed its oil production in recent years. Given this reality, it is

imperative that the industry aggressively promote natural gas for power generation, transportation, and a variety of other uses.

Also, at a time when global warming has taken center stage in the U.S. Congress and in state legislatures, the industry needs to replace misunderstandings about natural gas with credible facts. Most important is that natural gas is clean-burning and environmentally friendly.

Finally, the foundation is also pleased to report it has completed its interactive Web site. This capability will allow the foundation to disseminate industry's message to a far larger audience. The site provides a wealth of information on the industry and detailed data centers relating to the foundation's major programs, as well as news releases, copies of the foundation's newsletter, *Energy Literacy*, and membership information.

As our industry faces the many challenges of providing adequate and reliable energy supplies in the years ahead, an informed and supportive public could play a significant role in our success.

The foundation believes that adding this new outreach effort is a major development toward building a comprehensive public education program in Texas. □



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*Pat French joined the Texas Alliance of Energy Producers in 2000 and serves as its senior vice president as well as president of its affiliate organization, the Foundation for Energy Education. After earning an undergraduate degree in government and politics from the University of Maryland, French began his career on Capitol Hill in 1977 with the Republican National Committee. He served with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce from 1978 to 1990. In 1991, he became a senior partner with The Association Development Group, a Washington-based consulting firm specializing in national trade associations. Clients included the Independent Petroleum Association of America and the American Gas Association. French sits on the board of directors of the Global Energy Management Institute at the University of Houston, and on the Assessment & Strategy Development Committee of the Greater Houston Energy Collaborative.*