

SOONER SPOTLIGHT • BARNEY GROTEN

Barney Groten may be the University of Oklahoma's personification of an energy renaissance man. For his job, he needs to be. Groten recently was chosen to be the new director of OU's Energy Center.

Through his work as director, he hopes to form in Oklahoma something that currently may exist nowhere else: a learning and research center devoted to bringing together scholarly disciplines involved in energy affairs, from geology to engineering to economics—even English.

His office in the new Energy Center building contains an eclectic mix of his energy concerns: mineral samples encased in lucite, petroleum, geology, science and economics books and even a working model of a Stirling heat engine. Equally eclectic are his hobbies. He says he likes to scuba dive, dabble in photography and fix cars.

But since taking on his new job, he doesn't have time for hobbies. Energy, with its multi-national and overriding concerns, now takes his full attention.

Puffing on his pipe, Groten explains how the modern complexities of energy issues cut across all boundaries.

"Energy affairs are cross-disciplinary," he says. "Historically, each classic discipline developed along its own lines. Geologists studied geology, economists studied economics, chemists studied chemistry. Today, we need these groups to start talking to one another," he says, citing enhanced recovery as potentially involving many disciplines—geology, chemistry, physics and economics.

Enhanced recovery generally is the process of extracting the oil or gas that remains after conventional drilling. In the U.S., producers only extract about one-third of the oil or gas found, leaving the balance behind. However, the cost of the process is often higher than the price of oil from foreign nations.



OU's new Energy Center chief is Barney Groten, a man determined to earn national prominence for the center.

"It is important to develop less-expensive technology for enhanced recovery," Groten says, "but also to thoroughly understand the economics—and politics—of oil supply on a worldwide basis."

Groten describes the purpose of his directorship in the same direct manner: to establish the University of Oklahoma as a nationwide center of energy expertise.

"We want to focus on the best research in each of the energy disciplines," he says. "By whatever mechanism, I would like to strengthen all the ties between them."

This goal, Groten says, is linked directly to the building in which he sits. He explains that the OU Energy Center is in fact two Energy Centers: a building and a concept.

"The two obviously are integrated," he says. "Different disciplines can share the same labs. Different subjects can be down the hall from one another."

That working relationship, Groten believes, will drive home the concept of energy as a concern shared by all.

"In the past, people have discussed only the building," Groten says. "There is a critical element in welding these two ideas (the overall concern for energy and the idea of gathering various branches of knowledge in one building) together."

But it does not stop there, he says.

"I'd like this to be the place where industry, government and university come together. We need to pool the best talent in the country and focus it on energy-related affairs."

Groten thinks all would benefit: the University—including students—would learn the "real world" practical side of energy studies, industry would gain from participation in the cutting edge of modern energy thought, and government could draw on a wealth of energy knowledge.

Groten is accustomed to bringing different things together, particularly industry and education. After earning his bachelor of science degree from Brooklyn College in 1954 and his Ph.D. in chemistry from Purdue University in 1961, Groten joined Exxon's research department and occupied other management, marketing, planning and new venture development positions.

Education reappeared in his life when he served as Esso Chemical's European university research liaison and chairman of the board of Gulf Universities Research Consortium. He has traveled extensively lecturing at universities, and has published articles and papers in both German and English-speaking countries.

After working as director of research and business development for the Texas Eastern Corporation in Houston, Groten brought to OU his very definite ideas about the relationship between governments, industries and universities.

"The whole idea of university-government-industry sharing is a timely one," he says. "The concept benefits the community, the state and the region. We can generate something unique in Oklahoma and the Southwest. The job is to get the program in place."

With Groten, energy is in motion at the University of Oklahoma.