



Harold Hamm started Continental Resources, a multi-million-dollar oil and gas exploration company, with careful research and determination to succeed. He has approached life with diabetes in much the same way.

By Lynette Lobban

Hamm Gives More than His Name to Diabetes Research Center

Doctors at the Harold Hamm Oklahoma Diabetes Center know the Enid oil man for something even more important to them than his name on the building—his name on a chart. Hamm is one of 3,000 patients of the new facility targeting a deadly disease that has one in three Oklahomans in its sights. A \$10 million gift from Hamm in 2007 helped establish a national headquarters for diabetes research and education at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

“He wants Oklahoma to have a world-class diabetes facility,” says Martha Ogilvie, administrative director of the center. “He wants to find a cure.”

Daunting as that goal sounds, Hamm, a self-made billionaire, is no stranger to challenges. When he was 17, he took a good, hard look at his life and decided the best place to view the poverty of his childhood would be from the rearview mirror of a truck headed into the oil fields surrounding Enid in the 1960s. Distributive Education or “DE” allowed him to check out of Enid High at noon and clock in at a truck stop north of town, where he spent 60 hours a week servicing vehicles for Champlin Oil and others.

In his senior year, Hamm wrote an essay on oil and gas exploration that drew the attention of DE adviser J.W. “Jewell” Ridge, who encouraged him to continue his quest beyond high school. The oil men he met also fueled his ambition. They seemed larger than life, charismatic and generous with the young man who never needed to be told anything twice.

“They had a different mindset,” says Hamm, the youngest of 13 children born to sharecropper parents outside of Lexington, which was a short drive from Norman, but a huge leap to the University of Oklahoma.

Without money for college, Hamm created his own work-study curriculum of the oil business. He cleaned sludge and stock tanks, hauled fuel to drilling rigs, ran a water truck and

soaked up knowledge like a sponge. One summer he worked for an oil field service contractor and within a couple years was “pretty much running the operation.”

With the purchase of a used tank truck, Hamm went into business for himself, working frac jobs from Crescent to Ringwood. The area was booming, and Harold Hamm Tank Truck Service earned its place as one of the top oil field fluid transporters in the state. “That was fine,” he says. “But I wanted to *find* oil. That was where the fun was.”

In a makeshift office off his bedroom, Hamm set up ShellyDean Oil Inc., named for his two oldest daughters. After a 16-hour day in the field, he pulled a second shift as company landman and geologist, researching the area and ordering logs of wells that looked promising.

When property abandoned by Getty Oil became available, Hamm was primed and ready. “They were old wells, and they weren’t terribly expensive, but we borrowed money, and our bid came in on top,” he says. They tested the first well, then stepped out onto some acreage just west of Aline to drill No.2. “We wildcatted that well, hit the zone, and it made everything good,” he says. That was 1971.

Since then, Hamm has “hit the zone” often enough to hold a regular spot on *Forbes* list of the wealthiest people in America. His former one-room company is now Continental Resources Inc., which employs 450 people and holds assets nationwide.

A strong advocate of education, he began taking classes in geology at Phillips University in Enid. “I made my fortune first, then went back to school,” he says. “I wouldn’t necessarily recommend that order.” In 2009, the University of Oklahoma conferred its Doctor of Humane Letters Degree upon him.

“I’m passionate about family, the oil and gas industry and education,” Hamm says. “I feel very strongly about supporting higher education in Oklahoma and also about getting kids started out right.”

To that end, health issues are high on his list. When he was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 10 years ago, Hamm was ready to go anywhere in the world to seek the best treatment available.

“I was shocked,” he says. “I had the resources to go anywhere, and then found there was really nowhere to go. There is no major center for diabetes like there is for cancer or heart disease. Diabetes has been under the radar.”

Hamm started conducting his own research, and what he found was sobering. The nation as a whole, and Oklahoma in particular, was primed for a diabetes epidemic of epic proportions. Thirty-nine percent of Oklahomans either have diabetes or are pre-diabetic, research shows. “Native American populations were particularly susceptible,” he says. “I felt that the diabetes we were seeing was just the tip of the iceberg and that iceberg was upon us. I wanted to solve the problem.”

He met with OU President David Boren, who also had been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. The two men shared a vision of a comprehensive center focused on research, education, prevention and clinical services. The beginnings were already in place at HSC with the recruitment of Drs. Timothy Lyons and Kenneth Copeland, but there was still work to be done.

“We teamed up that day,” says Hamm. “His vision was as big as mine. I said, ‘What do you need?’ and ‘What can I do?’ We took our first step forward that day.”

That was three years ago, and the center is now a unified hub of research and treatment with spokes of education and prevention reaching into the state. Nearly \$60 million in research grants from entities like the National Institutes of Health are helping the cause. A recent outreach program in Enid tested a sample population of 18-to 40-year-olds for cholesterol, blood sugars, blood pressure and hemoglobin A1C and found that half the subjects showed risky numbers in at least one area.

“People can have diabetes and not know it until a lot of damage has been done,” Hamm says. Although the disease was not diagnosed in his family, he thinks at least two siblings and his mother, who died at 62, suffered from diabetes.

“There is not a procedure to ‘fix’ diabetes,” Hamm says. “It takes time. It’s an educational process. You have to change lifestyles.”

Like many native Oklahomans, Hamm still reminisces over a good chicken fried steak and cream gravy, or the sweet tooth he has had to overcome, but says the sacrifices are well worth it. Lifestyle changes include monitoring his diet and daily exercise. An avid outdoorsman, he walks three or four miles every morning with his dog, Coal, before heading into the office. He also works out at the gym he built for Continental Resources employees. In his Nichols Hills neighborhood of Oklahoma City, he has been instrumental in integrating a running trail through the green belt.

He also continues to explore. His search for oil now has led him to the Bakken Shale Reservoir—seven million acres in North Dakota and Montana. Continental Resources estimates the reserve contains eight billion barrels of oil, the largest find in the “Lower 48.”

The company is looking at new technology and horizontal drilling that will allow the extraction of oil and gas from the shale in large quantities. It is high-priced exploration, he says, but the reserves are there. His geologists estimate that unlocking the shale could extend natural gas resources from 50 to 200 years. For the Oklahoman who *Forbes* dubbed “The Last American Wildcatter,” those are odds worth taking.

“We’re trying to break the code,” he laughs. “I do enjoy a challenge.”

Lynette Lobban is associate editor of Sooner Magazine.