Memorials limited to 800 words (2-3 typewritten double-spaced pages); longer text subject to approval by Elected Editor.

DON L. HELLAR
(1920–1998)

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On November 30, 1998, the Kansas oil industry and geological profession lost one of those rare individuals who was admired and liked by all and acknowledged to be one of the “true gentlemen” of the industry. As Gus Messinger stated, “Don was a man in the oil industry of whom I have never heard any disparaging remarks.” Perhaps some of the thoughts of those who knew Don well can be summed up by the phrase, “He was a class act.”

Don was not only a native Kansan, but after arriving in Wichita in April 1920, he spent his childhood in Wichita as well as receiving his advanced education there. He was very proud that although his mother was an immigrant whose parents were from Germany and his father was an immigrant from Austria, their intent from the beginning was to be Americans, and they never spoke German in their home. Don Smith refers to his friend as being “generous but frugal.” Perhaps this was derived from his family background or from the route of working his way through college that was a necessity for Don.

He worked at a service station and at Cessna Aircraft during his periods of enrollment at Wichita University, 1938–1942 and 1948–1949. During the interim several companies employed him, but most particularly Schlumberger, in several localities including Oklahoma City, Shawnee, and Wichita. He returned to Wichita and found employment with Sohio, where came under the supervision and influence of K. T. Woodman who Don thought taught him a lot about “how to find oil.”

In 1942, Don married Gwen Dodson and they had two daughters, Karen Wright and Kathy Probst, both of whom reside in Wichita. Don was a family man, and as Gus Messinger writes, “he always thought about his family. When you visited him at his office, he would proudly show you some little gift or candy that someone in his family had given him.”

After graduation in 1949, Don continued with Sohio, but later joined Bay Petroleum. When Bay Petroleum merged with Tenneco he remained with the new company and for a period was stationed in north Texas. The year 1958 saw the formation of Hellar Drilling in conjunction with Pierce Musgrove. The company operated two drilling rigs until they were sold in 1973. As Don Smith comments, “These were highly competitive times in the drilling business and oil prices were low, but Don made a go of it.”

Gus indicates that this competitiveness carried over into card games and bowling where “Don hated to lose.”

Don was an oil finder who might discuss some of the low times, but as Gus puts it “never boasted about his success as a petroleum geologist. Although his oil discoveries were many, he was very humble about his abilities.”

He was also a professional, serving on several committees of the Kansas Geological Society, joining AAPG in 1951, thus reaching the status of emeritus member. He has also been an active member of the Society of Independent Professional Earth Scientists.

Perhaps a real commentary on Don comes from Don Smith: “Although Don undoubtedly could have afforded to eat each day at the Petroleum Club, he seemed to prefer to eat with a small group of older geologists usually at the ‘Linoleum Club,’ as we called the cafeteria on the mezzanine of the Nations Bank Building.”

Don will be greatly missed by his colleagues and host of friends in the oil industry.