

Alumni profiles: Martin Schuepbach



interview by Larisa LaMere

Martin Schuepbach obtained his PhD at Rice in 1974. His thesis was entitled “Comparison of Slope and Basinal Sediment Between a Marginal Cratonic Basin and a Marginal Geosynclinal Basin,” and he did his research with professors James Lee Wilson, Clark Burchfiel and John Warme.

He went on to work for ExxonMobil and Maxus Energy before starting his own energy exploration company, Schuepbach Energy, Inc. in 2007.

What Rice taught me:

As a Masters student in Switzerland, professors were like stern parents: not to be questioned and impossible to challenge. You were to learn according to what they taught you: classic structural geology ideas that hadn't been revised in years.

Coming to Rice for my doctorate gave me a new taste of structural geology. In classes, part of my grade depended on discussion participation. I was encouraged to speak up and think independently. I interacted with professors who were open to learning new things. And I constantly had my geology paradigms challenged, especially by other students. It was a powerful experience.

The rigorous research environment at Rice made me a better scientist, and lent to my deep conviction that it is important to always question, challenge, and think independently about information given to you. This conviction has followed my professional life after getting my Ph.D.

Advice for aspiring geology entrepreneurs:

1. **Think critically:** find the answer for all the questions that you have about a project before you start drilling -- or investing. Know what you are getting yourself into.
2. **Think technically:** do your own "field work." Don't trust what other people have told you about the area you're going into. In my experience important things often get overlooked or forgotten, and those things can be the base of your growth.
3. **Stay current:** always be up to date with equipment and technology: innovation and competitiveness are where new methods and products are being developed.
4. **Listen:** it is always much better to listen to people than to talk when you are meeting with them. When you begin to interface with your customers or partners, listening is key to you getting a better understanding of what need your product can fill or what problem it can solve, and the setting (political, economic, geologic) under which you're operating.

And most important:

Do what you love to do. I am not somebody who enjoys working in the office setting. I wanted more freedom in my life. Always remember that you have the freedom to choose how you spend your working life.