

## A big building – and a bold statement, too

**The deal will help Chesapeake Energy, based in Oklahoma, boost its local profile, experts say.**

**By DAVID WETHE**  
STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

FORT WORTH — The purchase of the high-profile Pier 1 Imports building will help morph the image of Chesapeake Energy from corporate outsider to a Fort Worth power player, local experts and image consultants say.

And although the move may not win over some neighborhood leaders who have fought with the Oklahoma City-based company on drilling issues, all sides seem to agree that Chesapeake is making a strong statement that it's here to stay for a while.

Crafting an image has been a key strategy for Chesapeake as it competes with a homegrown company in the Barnett Shale, Fort Worth-based XTO Energy, said Scott Dally, a veteran Fort Worth advertising executive.

One of the first things Chesapeake did was to hire Julie Wilson as a consultant in February 2006. Wilson had earned credentials in town by serving as a principal in two large marketing and communications firms in Fort Worth since 1987. At Chesapeake, she started bringing executives down from Oklahoma City to meet with the Fort Worth mayor, City Council members and business leaders.

She joined Chesapeake full time as vice president of corporate development in fall 2006, when the company snagged a huge drilling-rights deal at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport.

"It's obvious when Chesapeake hired her that they intended to utilize PR as one of the tools in their arsenal," Dally said.

The company has rolled out billboards across Tarrant County, hired more than a dozen public-affairs officials, including former Fort Worth Mayor Kenneth Barr, and launched television commercials touting the company's benefit to the region.

Chesapeake has also become a major donor. Just last week, it gave \$1 million to the United Way as a founding member of the Barnett Shale Endowment Fund.

But beyond those moves, the real estate buy will launch Chesapeake's image, said John Roach, a former chairman of Tandy Corp., now RadioShack, who remains a major player in Fort Worth's power circles. He said he has no ties to Chesapeake other than leasing his mineral rights to a company that Chesapeake bought.

"Certainly they will have a higher profile," Roach said. "Chesapeake is the outstanding company as far as making a presence in Fort Worth, even though their headquarters are not here."

Wilson said image didn't play a role in Chesapeake's decision to buy the building, but "I think it's a nice byproduct."

She said that when the company was setting up its first office in North Texas, in 2006, Fort Worth leaders "highly recommended" a downtown Fort Worth presence for the company. It established its temporary local home in the City Center's D.R. Horton Tower.

At that time, Chesapeake was trying to make a statement that "we're here, we're a player, and we want to be connected with serious business," she said.

Chesapeake hopes that its growing ties to the community help as it encounters opposition from residents who oppose neighborhood drilling.

One of them is Don Young of east Fort Worth, who says Chesapeake and other drillers are hurting his quality of life by replacing green space with industrial sites.

"I don't think Chesapeake is a good corporate citizen, and it doesn't matter what building they're in," said Young, who runs fwcando.org. "This is just another symbol of their arrogance, as far as I'm concerned."

Gary Hogan of Fort Worth, who



served on the committee that drew up Fort Worth's gas-drilling ordinance, said everything Chesapeake does "seems like they make it a big PR thing."

Donations and other positive public-relations moves are made "to keep the leasing going," he said.

"Then they go and do something repulsive like going through people's front yards," he said, referring to property seized through eminent domain for natural-gas pipelines.

Wilson said some criticisms of the company are legitimate.

But she said Chesapeake isn't any harder to deal with than other drilling companies.

She said acquiring the building is an example of doing things "the Fort Worth way," which is what Mayor Mike Moncrief often likes to say.

"It's doing all the things that the city expected us to do in a very responsible manner," Wilson said.

"Certainly having our Barnett Shale headquarters in Fort Worth rather than any of the other cities throughout the Metroplex, I think clearly demonstrates that we are committed to the Fort Worth way."

Staff writer Mike Lee contributed to this report.

David Wethe, (817) 685-3803  
dwethe@star-telegram.com