

PLEASANT DAYS WINTER 2023

Al~Ayyam Al~Jamilah

الأيام الجميلة

THE MAGAZINE
FOR SAUDI
ARAMCO RETIREES
WORLDWIDE

**HAFLA
CRUISE 2022:
'WE CAME!
WE SAILED!
WE CELEBRATED!'**



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Plucky sailor Bonnie Cook took full advantage of the 32nd biennial Annuitants Reunion—the first-ever to unfold on a cruise—to see sights along the way. The wife of the late Henry Cook, she was among 86 retirees and family members who attended the floating Hafla, which departed Miami on Oct. 31 and stopped at Cozumel, Mexico, and Georgetown, Grand Cayman (in the background), before returning home Nov. 5.

Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah (“Pleasant Days”) is produced by Aramco Americas for annuitants, families and friends of Saudi Aramco and its associated companies.

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20 Christmas Fêtes Held in Austin and Houston

Nearly 120 holidaymakers celebrated “special connections” at Christmas parties in Austin and Houston. Bill Smart, shown with his aide, gaily attired Sally Johnson, welcomed 56 guests to a luncheon in Houston on Dec. 13. “It’s good to see so many old friends,” he said. Sixty guests turned out for a dinner in Austin on Dec. 12.

22 Antiquities ‘Knight’ Remembered

Elinor Nichols, who led the way for fellow former Aramcons to repatriate archeological artifacts they had found in Saudi Arabia, died Sept. 7, 2022. Dubbed an antiquities “knight” in the Saudi press for her work, launched in 2009, she won the hearts of Saudis and fellow collectors, whose discoveries went on display in the kingdom’s modern museums.



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Diagnosed with breast cancer in 1993, Helen Streaker underwent a mastectomy. When cancer returned in 2016, she found another—much less invasive—way to tackle it: cryoablation,

in which the tumor is literally frozen. Since then, the former teacher has worked as a tireless advocate for the procedure.

30 Ex-School's Chief Celebrates Cycling 'Graduation'

Former Aramco Schools head Tim Hansen, a longtime long-distance athlete in Dhahran, took his cycling skills with him when he moved to the U.S. to work at ASC in 2013. The man who saw hundreds of students receive their diplomas achieved his own dream of cycling across America in 2022. Finishing the 52-day, 3,100-mile trek from sea to sea "was almost like graduation," he said.



28 Mahoney Kept Keen Eye on Middle East

When John Mahoney joined Aramco in 1978, an illness in his family cut short his time at the company. But he kept ties with Aramco and the region, becoming executive director of Americans for Middle East Understanding. When he retired in 2022, after 43 years at the helm, the organization honored him and his wife, Sharon, establishing an annual prize in their names for those who have boosted understanding, wellbeing and justice in the Middle East.



Cover: Retirees and family members turned out for a group photo on the grand staircase of the *Celebrity Summit*, the venue for the 32nd biennial Annuitants Reunion. The first-ever Hafla at sea, held in Oct. 31-Nov. 5, went off like nautical clockwork in the Caribbean, under the guidance of reunion host Vicci Turner, waving third from right in the front row.

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saudi aramco





Provides Plenty to Celebrate

Written by Arthur Clark
Photography by Waleed Dashash and Arthur Clark



LEFT: Hafla “Captain” Vicci Turner, center, and “Ensign” Judy Walker, right, pose with reunion “crew” members Andrea and Michelle Hamblin, first and second from left, and their mother, Carol—on Oct. 31, launch day for the 32nd Annuitants Reunion. **BELOW:** Aileen and Duke Walters stake out a good spot to celebrate Halloween.





We came! We sailed! We celebrated!

Those words, spoken by a novice Aramco mariner with a passing knowledge of Julius Caesar, captured the spirit of the Hafla 2022 Cruise, the first Annuitants Reunion ever to unfold on a ship in the Caribbean (or any other big body of water).

But the comment might have actually underemphasized the *joie de vivre* of the 32nd Hafla, held Oct. 31-Nov. 5—the first biennial gathering since COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. The previous reunion, scheduled for Colorado Springs, Colo., in September 2020, was canceled due to the pandemic.

Eighty-six former Aramcons and family members turned out for the reunion, led by “Captain” Vicci Turner, who lived in all four company communities in the Eastern Province between 1975-2004. Her online publication, *AramcoExpats.com*, launched two decades ago, kept retirees apprised of developments aboard the *Celebrity Summit* in real time.

Fred and Jill Killgore pointed to the pandemic in their appreciation of the reunion. They were at ASC in Houston and then in Dhahran from 1980-2002.

The couple retired to Tampa, Fla., “so it was easy to get to Miami,” the cruise departure point, said Fred. “With the pandemic, we felt like we needed to get out” to see old friends.

Atlanta retirees Mark and Morgan Dietsch, who

lived in Abqaiq and Dhahran from 1991-2010, voiced a similar sentiment at their first biennial bash.

“We miss our contacts with Aramco,” Morgan said. “It’s good to touch base and reconnect with our friends—our family,” Mark added.

Robert and Nancy Taylor, who had just finished sailing on the *Discovery Princess* with cast members from *The Love Boat* TV series and were looking ahead to their third 110-day round-the-world cruise early in 2023, called the reunion “the best thing the annuitants have done so far.” The Taylors, who lived in Dhahran from 1985-2002, began taking cruises in 1989.

“World cruises are the best because you get to see the world... and you have to pack and unpack just once,” Nancy said with a big smile.

Despite a career in data processing, Robert said he is still challenged by what he finds when he boards a ship. “I spent my whole career working on computers, but I couldn’t figure out the wi-fi here,” he noted.

Hafla attendee Wilma Wilcox, another inveterate cruise-taker, and her late husband, John, lived in Dhahran from 1977-’87. She had just returned from a trip from New York to Britain, Spain and Portugal when she arrived in Miami for the reunion. The day she returned from the Hafla, the 80-year-old was scheduled to sail to Buenos Aires.

A music aficionado, she also leads trips for the Lyric Opera of Kansas City in her home state of Missouri. “Travel gets into your blood,” she said.

Sailing is obviously good for her. “Some days I lag a little bit,” she said, “but I haven’t had a cold for three years.”

Cruises are nothing new for Fred Bobb, either. A Floridian and a second-generation Aramcon who worked for the company from 1980-’88, he sailed frequently with his father, retiree Dr. Arthur Bobb.

“He would have loved to have come on this cruise,” but at age 97 “he can’t travel well,” Fred said.


Fred estimated that he’s taken “more than 100 cruises.” On his first ocean cruise, at age nine in 1966, he sailed with his mother, Doris, who turned 100 in December, and his brothers Alan and Andy, eight and seven, from Holland to New York.

“That got us hooked,” Fred said.

He first set sail on dhows in the Gulf as a Boy Scout. “The

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Showing off some of their reunion kit are, from left, Rick Owen, Mike and Judy Butler, and Nancy and Robert Taylor; tablemates Beatrice and Paul Urban and Oriel Carey are all smiles in a liner dining hall; Fred and Jill Killgore receive their Hafla badges from Judy Walker.



A full-page photograph of Mark and Morgan Dietsch on the deck of a ship. Mark, an older man with a grey beard, is on the left, wearing a grey t-shirt and blue jeans, looking towards Morgan. Morgan, a woman with dark hair, is on the right, wearing a black t-shirt with a cartoon rabbit graphic and black pants, laughing heartily. She is holding a black bag with a smartphone attached. The background shows a city skyline across a body of water under a clear blue sky.

Mark and Morgan Dietsch share a laugh as *Celebrity Summit* departs Miami with 84 fellow reunion attendees. "We miss our contacts with Aramco," said Morgan. "It's good to reconnect with our friends—our family," Mark added.

dhaw crews made cardamom coffee and we brought box lunches,” he said.

Michelle Hamblin, daughter of Carol Hamblin and her late husband, Terry, who attended with her mom and her sister, Andrea, had her own unique cruise tale to tell. The Hamblins lived in Ras Tanura, Abqaiq and Dhahran from 1973-’96.

Michelle, who was in university when her dad joined the company but visited the kingdom as a returning student, is a self-described “nomad archeologist” who has worked in French Guiana for the past decade. To get to the Hafla, she crossed the Maroni River to Suriname in a pirogue—a canoe carved from a tree trunk—and then traveled to the capital, Paramaribo, to catch a plane to Miami.

The trip took one and a half days, faster by half a day than flying from French Guiana to Miami via Paris.

“It was an adventure to go that way,” Michelle said. “I had to step on a rock to get into the pirogue.”

The Hafla cruise proved “a real good opportunity to get together with family and Aramco family,” she said.

“Your Aramco family is your family,” added Carol, who lives in Naples, Fla. “You’ve got to get back in touch once in a while.”

But it was Andrea, from Richardson, Texas, who got the Hafla ball rolling for the family. “When I saw the Aramco cruise, I said, ‘Hey, Mom, we’ve got to do this!’”

In fact, it was a double reunion, for the Hamblin sisters had not seen each other for five years.

Kristopher and Bronwyn Horvath probably had the closest personal and professional connection to the seaborne reunion. Kris joined the Marine Dept. in Ras Tanura in 1982, then moved to Vela in Dhahran and Dubai, retiring in 2012.

The couple’s ties with reunion-organizer Vicci Turner dated back to their days together in Ras Tanura.

The *Summit* embarked from Miami on a sunny Halloween afternoon and returned with a happy bunch of Haflawis six days later after sailing past Cuba and making stops in Cozumel, Mexico, and the Cayman Islands. Many attendees had kicked off the reunion with old friends a day or two early at a designated hotel in Miami.

Aramco Americas President Nabeel I. AlAfaleg welcomed attendees with a letter to each annuitant.



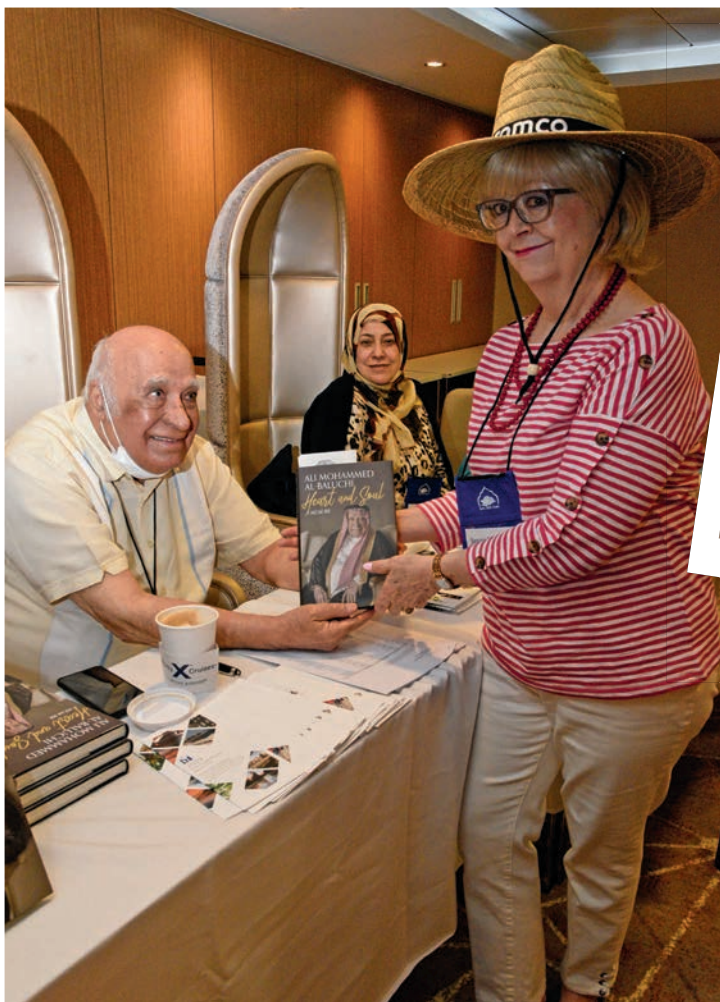
FROM TOP: Ed Dymicki and Victoria Fernando, who met in Dhahran, take time out from the Hafla hustle; dancing (with crew members) was the order of the evening after the Gala Banquet; Vicci Turner flashes a smile as Dick Doughty, *AramcoWorld* editor and Hafla DJ, spins electronic disks at the gala.

“Whether you have stepped onboard as an Aramco annuitant or a family member, you are now back among your worldwide ‘Aramco family,’” he said. “May these days be your time to review friendships while fully enjoying [the cruise].”

“Since the 2018 Annuitants Reunion in Austin, Texas, Aramco Services Company has taken the name Aramco Americas as a signal of the continuing global integration of the Aramco enterprise...,” he noted. “We are changing and growing.”

“These are times of uncommon challenges and great opportunities,” he said, highlighting the work by annuitants that had laid firm foundations for today’s enterprise.

“The pride that all of us at Aramco Americas feel today is a pride that rests not upon our efforts alone, but also on the hard



work, habits and inspirations that came before—your efforts. You are among the informal ambassadors of one of the world’s most successful projects in global commercial cooperation, an enterprise the sustains much of the modern world.

“In recognition of this, Aramco Americas is honored to support Hafla 2022. You have my warmest wishes for a delightful, relaxing, fun-filled week.”

Attendees took AlAfaleg at his word, enjoying themselves to the fullest.

For cruise neophytes like this writer, the Hafla onboard the *Summit* was magical—like a floating version of Aladdin’s lamp. More than three football fields long and a dozen decks tall, it featured several formal dining rooms with special menus—one of which welcomed attendees every evening.

The gala dinner took place Nov. 1.

The *Summit* also featured a deck with breakfast, lunch and dinner self-service with food from around the world—like the Dhahran Dining Hall on steroids. There was even piping-hot oatmeal, with raisins nearby, for folks who wanted to reconnect with 5:30 a.m. culinary memories in Dhahran.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A blue Caribbean backdrops (from left) Debra and Bob Lumpa, Yolanda Brown and David and Vicki Jes-sich in a *Summit* café; Debra reunited with her 'Udhailiyah kindergarten student, Waleed Dashash—part of the Aramco Americas Hafla team—whom she taught in 1985; Susan Mayernik receives her copy of Ali Baluchi’s biography as Ali’s wife, Amira, looks on.



Haflawis caught a water taxi to the quay at Cozumel, Mexico, under overcast skies to explore sites including Mayan ruins dating to 800 CE. The reunion launched from Miami at the end of October and sailed to Cozumel and Grand Cayman, returning to port Nov. 5.

Cruise participants could also watch performances in a multi-balcony theater in the heart of ship, shop in a colorful internal *suq*, swim in one of several pools, shoot baskets on the top deck or watch films (such as *Pirates of the Caribbean*) under the stars.

A good number caught ferries for the half-hour ride to Cozumel on Nov. 2 on waters still a little choppy from a near brush by Hurricane Lisa just a day before.

Those who'd gone green in the gills quickly got their color back on a stroll through Mayan ruins dating to 800 CE. The last group returned to the ferry several hours later drenched to the bone by showers spinning off the departed hurricane, like a goodbye kiss.

Other tours included a visit to Cozumel National Marine Park and a "dolphin encounter."

On Nov. 3, a number of Hafla attendees took advantage of the chance to visit Georgetown on Grand Cayman and visit sites in the self-governing British Territory.

Woody Collins, who attended his with his wife, Christine, said the outing had whetted his appetite for surf-skiing. The 72-year-old, who worked in Dhahran and Ras Tanura from 1980-2005, said he'd windsurfed in Ras Tanura and surf-skied in Florida, but noted that what he found on Grand Cayman "makes me jealous: not rough and just enough wind."

The Hafla contingent ranged in age from 91-year-old Ali Baluchi, who came from the kingdom with his wife Amira, to



eight-year-old Nathaniel Edoo. Nathaniel attended with his parents Louis and Diana, from England, and his grandfather, Annuitant Everard Edoo, from nearby Aruba, who worked as an inspection engineer in Ras Tanura, Dhahran, Abqaiq, Berri, Hawiyah, Khurais, Haradh, 'Udhailiyah, Safaniya and Tanajib from 2002-'12.

It was Everard's first reunion. "I'm enjoying it," he said. "It's pretty special."

Louis, who visited his father several times in Ras Tanura, said he felt "very much at home among extended family" on the cruise. "It doesn't get any better than this."

Nathaniel spent a lot of time with four crew members, from Ukraine, Indonesia, the U.S. and Columbia, who staffed the "Camp at Sea" for children on the *Summit*. "It was fun!" he said.

The cruise provided surprise reconnections for some attendees. Waleed Dashash, a multimedia specialist from the kingdom who works at Aramco Americas, and who photographed the reunion for *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah*, met Debra Lumpa, his kindergarten teacher in 'Udhailiyah in 1985. She attended with her husband,

From left, Bonnie Cook, Carol Hamblin and Peggy Heil, backed by Richard Heil and Lawrence and Penkhae Olsen, line up for a photo on a Grand Cayman beach, as a windsurfer sails by.



Bob. He joined Aramco in 1980, the couple married in 1981 and they retired in 2019.

“Waleed was really a good kid. He’s still a little shy,” said Debra. “It’s amazing to reconnect with someone I had in my class.”

“She was really nice,” said Waleed, whose father, Mohammed, was based in ‘Udhailiyah from 1984-’86. “We all loved her as students.”

The number of Aramco celebrants onboard the *Summit* was a drop the ship’s capacity: It can carry as many as 2,400 passengers and this cruise boarded around half that. The crew numbered 940 from 60 countries, a little like Aramco’s demographic.

Still, the Aramco presence stood out—by Hafla participants’ blue badges, by Aramco-themed cabin-door decorations and by conversations sprinkled with names like Abqaiq, Hofuf and Dhahran.

Vicci Turner was ably assisted by her son, Rusty Swayne, and his wife, Kara, who covered the event for *AramcoExpats.com*. Turner gave special thanks to veteran Hafla hands Bill and Judy Walker as “my main helpers throughout this past year.” She also thanked annuitant Susan Long, Dick Doughty and Waleed Dashash from Aramco Americas and retiree Arthur Clark for their assistance.

Doughty, editor of *AramcoWorld*, gave a presentation about of the evolution of the magazine—from its launch in 1949 as an in-house publication to familiarize Western employees with their new surroundings to one that offers fresh views on a world encompassing East and West for global audience.

He said that the magazine, while devoting more and more resources to its digital side, would remain a print publication for the foreseeable future. “Until someone figures out how to put a digital magazine on the coffee table, that’s the way it will be,” he quipped.

Doughty also boosted the rhythm of the reunion by DJ’ing an eclectic mix of music from the Middle East and the West that brought Haflawis to the dance floor.

He noted that the original *Aramco World*, published from company headquarters at 505 Park Ave. in New York, “was more like *The Arabian Sun* than like today.”

As the magazine’s scope and size grew, and company headquarters moved to Dhahran, *Aramco World* migrated to the Middle East—to Beirut—in the mid-’60s, taking on the look of magazines like *Life*, *Look* and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

In the mid-’70s, the magazine moved to Leiden in The Netherlands. The period that followed was a time of “spectacular growth in Saudi Arabia,” fueling “big articles” about such achievements as the construction of the E.W. Crude Oil

Pipeline, Doughty said.

Doughty, only the third *Aramco World* editor since 1964, after Paul Hoyer and Rob Arndt, said the magazine publishes articles that are “not about us and them, but we.”

“If I could touch your arm and you could touch my arm, we could break down the walls of misunderstanding,” he said.

The publication is a tool to build positive relationships.

“People exposed to *AramcoWorld* hold the company in higher esteem than those who do not read it,” Doughty noted. For readers without direct connections to the Middle East, the goal is “taking them a little farther in learning about that world.”

Ali Baluchi reflects as well as any retiree the mission of taking things “a little farther” to keep alive ties that blossomed at Aramco among people from around the globe. Baluchi, who retired as head of Community Services in 1990, called the Hafla “a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our relationships over the years.”

He and his wife, Amira, and Abdullah Buhilaigah, a Personnel Dept. retiree, comprised the crew of Saudi retirees at the Hafla.

When Baluchi retired, “I decided we should build a Reunion House” for gatherings of former employees from around the world, he said.

That aspiration bore fruit at reunions in 2000, 2009, 2015 and 2019. The fifth, the longest ever, is set for March 1-14 this year.

Baluchi said he hoped for a large turnout by retirees and family members who had never attended an in-kingdom reunion, noting that around 550 people had already expressed an interest in taking part.

“Please come back to your second home,” said Baluchi, who attended his first Annuitants Reunion in Pleasanton, Calif., in September 1958 when he and the late



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: From left, Allison Taylor and her mom, Bonnie Cook, and Adele Tavares, take time out from touring Tulum on Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula; Aileen Walters, Adele Tavares and Laurie Swanson join a party onboard the *Summit*; Lawrence and Penkhae Olsen pose with a Grand Cayman pirate.



Bill and Judy Walker, like a number of Haflawis, decorated their cabin door with memorabilia of their days in the kingdom.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: The oldest Hafla attendee, Ali Baluchi, 91, meets the youngest, Nathaniel Edoo, eight, grandson of retiree Everard Edoo; Jane and Jary Archer step out on the Summit dance-floor; the Archers and Laurie Swanson wave at the end of a day aboard the Summit.

you made there are so special.”

She took the advice of one of those friends, Norma Quijano—who attended with

her husband, Reynaldo, and urged her to sign up for the reunion. “I thought, ‘I’m going to go and I’m going to have fun,’” Susan said.

And she did.

“Living in Saudi Arabia was a dream come true,” she said. “This [cruise] is more of that dream.”

Her views were seconded by Duke and Aileen Walters, from Nottingham, England. The couple lived in Dhahran from 1977-’99.

“I think it’s the people who make a reunion special,” Duke said. “It’s the only time you get a chance to talk openly about your experiences [at Aramco]. At home, they just don’t get it.”

“Here, you can talk about shared experiences,” said Aileen.

“This has been fantastic,” Duke said. “We’ve really had a good time.”

Mustapha al-Khan were on an assignment visiting energy facilities in the U.S. One-hundred-forty-seven retirees attended the inaugural biennial reunion, which Andy and Evelyn Anderson hosted.

“Reunions offer the chance to renew relationships with our friends,” said Baluchi, who has only missed five Annuitants Reunions since then.

“What makes me excited is that we love you as much as you love Saudi Arabia,” he said, adding that “Saudi Arabia has changed tremendously socially and environmentally” in recent years.

“When you come and see us again you will see the differences: new cities, entertainment, amusement parks that are youth oriented.”

Baluchi said that Ali Al-Naimi had “personally” asked him to reprise his role as reunion chairman. He noted that his ties with the former Aramco president and CEO, and minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, date back to 1949 when they attended Aramco’s Jabal School.

Baluchi recalled that as a young man in 1956 he had predicted that one day Aramco would be “run by Saudis,” a statement met with derision by a Western consular official.

“Saudi Aramco is being run by Saudis and many of you helped with that training effort,” he told Hafla attendees. “You must be very proud of that. This is a product of your efforts.”

Baluchi, who spent part of the cruise signing copies of his book *Heart and Soul: A Memoir*, said the 2023 reunion would be “the best reunion ever, with more than 100 events to be enjoyed.”

It will include a “welcoming luncheon,” rather than a dinner, so that more Saudi retirees can attend with their wives; a trip to an offshore platform in the Gulf; and a special program in Riyadh about Neom, the futuristic city being built from scratch in northwestern Saudi Arabia.

In addition, a trip to Yanbu’ will be added to the itinerary. It will include a visit to the house where T.E. Lawrence lived during the revolt against Turkey that he supported during WWI.

Susan Mayernik may have summed up what’s best about reunions. She worked at ASC and then lived in Dhahran with her late husband, Steve, from 1979-2005.

“The time in Saudi Arabia was special to us,” said Susan, who taught ceramics classes in her home for seven years after getting her start as a member of the Dhahran Art Group. “The friends





PORTRAIT GALLERY



Penkhae and Lawrence Olsen



Gillian Stone and Saul Asekun



Errol Thompson and Vicci Turner



Judy and Bill Walker



Ali and Amira Baluchi



Susan Long



Adele Tavares



Jane and Jary Archer



Abdullah Buhlaigah and Vicci Turner



Judy and Mike Butler



Mark and Morgan Dietsch



Fred Bobb



Carol, Andrea and Michelle Hamblin



Nancy and Robert Taylor



The Dhahran Theatre Group Crew



Laurie and Fred Swanson



Jackie Carr



Karen Shepard and Gary Ingraham



Everard Edoo



Bob and Debra Lumpa



Victoria Fernando and Ed Dymicki



Peggy and Richard Heil



Delores Marshall



Allison Cook Taylor and Bonnie Cook



The 'Udhailiyah Crew



Norma and Ray Quijano



Nena Mahoney



Paul and Beatrice Urban



The Abqaiq Crew



The Dhahran Crew



Don and Ginny Hixson



Oriel Carey



Rusty and Kara Swayne



The Ras Tanura Crew



Bruce and Mary Helen Hayden



Rick Owen



Audrey and Scott Stanaland



Vicki and David Jessich



Bronwyn and Kris Horvath



Dulce and Walter Smith



Christine and Woody Collins



Susan Mayernik



Gaylynn and Mark Cowan



Aileen and Duke Walters



Aramco Americas Sailors: Arthur Clark, Dick Doughty and Waleed Dashash

Season's Greetings

Ring Loud and Clear at Fêtes in Austin and Houston

Nearly 120 happy former Aramcons bid each other "Seasons Greetings" at back-to-back Christmas parties in Austin and Houston in mid-December.

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARTHUR CLARK



A holiday dinner in Austin on Dec. 12 hosted by David and Vicki Jessich, with the assistance of Bill and Judy Walker and Jack and Ellen Meyer, drew 60 retirees and family members to The Austin Club in a historic downtown building. In Houston, 56 people turned out for a luncheon Dec. 13 hosted by Bill and Mary Smart and Sally Johnson, and arranged by Paul and Margaret Daffin, at the Royal Oaks Country Club.

"We are all getting older, but we love seeing you," David Jes-

sich told guests in his welcoming address in Austin. "We hope to see you again next year!"

The event offered golden opportunities for retirees to greet former neighbors around a 12-foot Christmas tree. That was the case for Marti Knotts and Jane Archer, who lived close together in Abqaiq in the mid-'70s.

Asked if she would "do it again" if she had a chance to rejoin

Sharing good cheer in Austin, *below*, from left: 1) Judy Walker, Vicki Jessich, Rose Anne Scott, Joy Neumann and Leona Stockenberger; 2) Peter Neumann, Hans Stockenberger and Scott Richards; 3) Lisa Rich Hunter and Leona Stockenberger; 4) Dan McCue, Debbie Van Wanseele and David Jessich; 5) Peter and Carol Murnane, Bill and Jane Argo and Bill Woods (front), and Teresa and Howard Berg (back).





Celebrating the season in Houston, *above*, from left: 1) Bill Smart, Sally Johnson, John Miller and Rose Anne Scott; 2) Eric Madsen and Khan Akmal; 3) Phyllis Taquard, Jane Depew, Mark Nance, Marianne and Bruce Zimmerman, Sal Guttilla and Judy Ottman.

the company with her husband Jary—whom she met in Abqaiq where they both taught PE—Archer said, “Absolutely.”

Knotts said she would too, noting that she and her husband, Mel, “didn’t take enough trips.”

The get-together started at 7 p.m. and included an hour-long reception and an hour-long dinner in a gaily decorated room, capped by two hours set aside just for conversation.

Rose Anne Scott, who worked at ASC between 1977-2018, attended both the Austin and Houston parties. She said her career at Staffing Services had given her the chance to develop friendships with “quite a few people” over the years.

“I recognize a lot of people I know,” she said at the Austin event, adding that Christmas parties aren’t the only celebrations she receives invitations to join. “I get invited to ‘Id celebrations by Pakistani retirees” with whom she interacted, she said.

Bill Smart welcomed guests to the holiday party in Houston, thanking everyone for turning out for the annual event. He said it was good to see so many “old friends.”

He also paid tribute to the Houston Lunch Bunch members who died in 2022: Hank Barracano, Willie Contello, John Wolfe, Art Spooner, Nick Tannous, Donnie Watson, Phil Lyons and Verne Stueber—a longtime employee at Aramco and ASC in New York

and Houston who himself served as the Houston Christmas Party host for many years.

Debbie LaRue then addressed the group about planning for the 2023 Expatriates Reunion in Dhahran, set for March 1-14.

Sal Guttilla, who worked for ASC Purchasing from 1970-2013, said the holiday party provided the opportunity to “brush off the cobwebs” when it comes to old friendships.

“Once you leave, you leave,” he said, wistfully. “You can’t go back.”

Former Aramco and ASC employees Mark Nance, a Brat, and his wife, Janie Depew, concurred about the pleasure of reconnecting with old friends.

“We always enjoy seeing people we worked with and occasionally people we grew up with—like Eric Madsen and members of the [Gary] Owen family,” Mark said. “We have so much in common.”

Phyllis Taquard, a dietician at the Dhahran Heath Center from 1977-’87, also celebrated the chance to be with friends.

“If you haven’t been with Aramco, people just don’t understand. There’s a special connection,” she said.

That “special connection” rang loud and clear—like bells in a Christmas carillon—at the pair of Texas holiday parties for annuitants in December.

Petite

ANTIQUITIES KNIGHT

REMEMBERED

By Arthur Clark

Elinor Nichols, a petite but powerful “knight” in the campaign to repatriate Saudi Arabian archeological artifacts, died Sept. 7, 2022 in Lincoln, Mass. She was 95 years old.

An American who grew up in India with her sister and their missionary parents, she worked through Zahir Othman, a heritage specialist in Riyadh, and this author to send home 400 pounds of stone antiquities that she and her husband, Dr. Roger Nichols, had discovered on desert outings during his 1956-‘70 career with Aramco.

She arrived in Dhahran in 1957 with the couple’s daughters, Kathleen and Wendy. Their son, Quaife, was born after that.

Her items were among the artifacts that were returned by expatriate employees who had found them and taken them out of the kingdom before it had established robust museum facilities.

That work took place through Saudui Aramco’s Antiquities Homecoming Project in coordination with the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) in 2011. Nichols, who appeared posing with a grindstone in a story about the campaign in *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah*, said she was proud to be the “poster girl” for the project.

Around 40 expatriates, all but one from Aramco, returned more than 50,000 artifacts ranging from stone arrowheads and stamp seals to clay pots, potsherds and delicate glass vessels.

I first met Nichols at her home on Bailey’s Island, Mass., in 2009. She’d read about the new National Museum in Riyadh and wanted to return several heavy grindstones and a red-hued block of stone carved with an ancient script.

She called them “sweet friends,” but said they belonged back in Saudi Arabia.

One grindstone came from an ancient settlement atop a *jabal* on the Sarrar Escarpment in the north of the Eastern Province.

The stone with carved letters came from a site that the Nichols and their daughters visited in northwestern

In 2012, Elinor Nichols received a certificate of appreciation from Prince Sultan ibn Salman, then president of the Saudi Commission of Tourism and Antiquities, for returning archeological artifacts to the kingdom.



Saudi Arabia when they were traveling to Mada'in Salih. No one knew what the letters said or who had carved them.

That mystery was solved when Dr. Michael MacDonald at Oxford University's Oriental Institute sent *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah* a photo of the stone block *in situ* at Jabal Ghunaim, about 400 miles east of Tayma. The writing was "in the Taymanitic script, which was used in and around Tayma in the mid-sixth century BCE," he wrote.

It spelled the name of a ruler: "'l son of 'sgr."

Nichols kept the stone block from Jabal Ghunaim and several grindstones in her home; others were nestled, half hidden, in the grass outdoors.

But how to get them into the National Museum?

I contacted Zahir Othman, director-general of the al-Turath (Heritage) Foundation in Riyadh and he alerted the SCTA. The Antiquities Homecoming ball started rolling.

All of Nichols's antiquities now reside in the National Museum, thanks to her determination and the assistance of the Saudi Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Nichols was among 23 Americans and family members—along with a number of Saudis—whom the SCTA honored in Riyadh in February 2012 for returning antiquities they'd found and protected over the years. At a ceremony in the National Museum, SCTA President Prince Sultan ibn Salman gave them certificates of appreciation and thanked each donor.

Earlier, he had written a letter to Nichols thanking her for "returning your great collection of Saudi artifacts." He added that "preserving and exhibiting ancient treasures of the kingdom have become a major effort of SCTA...to increase tourism to these unique sightseeing attractions...and enhance the edu-

cation of Saudi Arabians about their heritage and history."

He met the



Counterclockwise from left: Grindstones like this one and a block of stone inscribed with Taymanitic script dating to the mid-sixth century BCE were among the artifacts Elinor Nichols returned to the kingdom; she posed with another grindstone for a story about the Antiquities Homecoming Program.



expatriate do-

nors the day before the ceremony in

Riyadh, telling them. "Really, you are being part of a major heritage initiative of this country."

Othman struck up a close friendship with Nichols because of her concern for the country's heritage. He met her when she traveled to Riyadh and they kept in touch after that.

Othman dubbed Elinor a "knight" for her role in returning archeological treasures to the kingdom in a story honoring her published in *Al-Yamamah* magazine on Sept. 29 last year.

"I left part of my heart in your great deserts," he quoted her as saying.

In a film interview in 2011, Nichols talked about her emotional connection to the artifacts her family had collected.

"I miss them because I had them in every room," she said. "I used to greet them and say, 'Hi, sweet friends.'"

"It was an exciting process to give them back," she said. "I hated to part with them because they reminded me of happy days. But they needed to go back.... They belonged to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

A highlight of her 2012 visit to Riyadh was meeting Princess Adela, King Abdullah's daughter. Nichols noted that the princess thanked the "people who appreciated, valued and preserved" antiquities and then returned them.

That work "shows a deep appreciation for the history of our nation," the princess said. "I believe the gesture was a great one as after keeping [the antiquities] for a long time some would feel that those pieces were part of their lives."

Nichols is survived by her children. The family may be contacted through her daughter Kathleen at poteefox@gmail.com.



Breast Cancer SURVIVOR HAILS CHILLY *BREAKTHROUGH*

By
ARTHUR CLARK



**OCTOBER IS SPECIAL
FOR HELEN STREAKER.
IT'S BREAST CANCER
AWARENESS MONTH.**

Pink ribbons flutter. Medical professionals and survivors talk about the illness. Volunteers raise money for research into its causes, prevention, diagnosis, treatment and cure.

And Streaker thinks about her own battle with breast cancer.

Streaker, who joined Aramco as a fifth-grade teacher in Dhahran in 1959, knows the subject well. She underwent a mastectomy in Houston in 1993 after being diagnosed with a breast tumor. Then, after another tumor appeared in 2016, she discovered a much less invasive way to tackle the malignancy: cryoablation.

Opposite: A happy Helen Streaker went to lunch with her doctor in California after undergoing cryoablation—tumor freezing—to tackle breast cancer in 2016. The procedure took about half an hour. “You have it and you go to lunch,” she said. **Right:** Streaker posed in her home in Houston in 2022 for a *Houston Chronicle* story about her how she had dealt with breast cancer—from a mastectomy to cryoablation.

Since that successful procedure and another two years ago, the 87-year-old with a brilliant smile has been eager to get the word out about what likely saved her life.

Streaker was featured on the front page of the *Houston Chronicle*’s “RENEW” section last March. The story, headlined “Cold Comfort,” said cryoablation “literally puts tumors into a deadly deep freeze—with no surgery, radiation or chemotherapy required.”

She was upbeat last fall when, despite being hospitalized after a fall in her home in Houston, she told *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah* her cancer-treatment story and reminisced about her life at Aramco.

Streaker, who met her husband-to-be, Hal, at the Cairo Airport in 1960—after mistaking the fellow Aramcon for an Egyptian tour guide—said she was “thrilled” to talk about her innovative procedure.

“I am passionate about women not having unnecessary surgery,” she said.

She’s spoken about cryoablation to groups in Texas, Oregon, Washington, California, Colorado, Kansas and Oklahoma. TV stations in Houston and Denver have interviewed her about the procedure.

“I wanted to speak whenever I could,” she said. “It has been my passion for the past several years.”

When she was diagnosed with a breast tumor in 2016, the hospital where she’d had the mastectomy advised her that her age made her too high-risk for more surgery; in addition, she’d already received the “maximum-for-life” amount of chemotherapy. The “only option” left was a drug called Arimidex that made her so sick she felt it wasn’t worth taking.

“After I started on the cancer medication, it became almost unbearable,” Streaker said in a story in *AramcoExpats.com* in 2017. “I was taking the maximum amount of pain medication possible and still the pain would keep me awake at night.

“I was not living. I was merely enduring being alive. Life was not good.”

Then she underwent stem-cell treatment, which got rid of the pain but “would not put my cancer in remission. I was still on the hated cancer medication.”

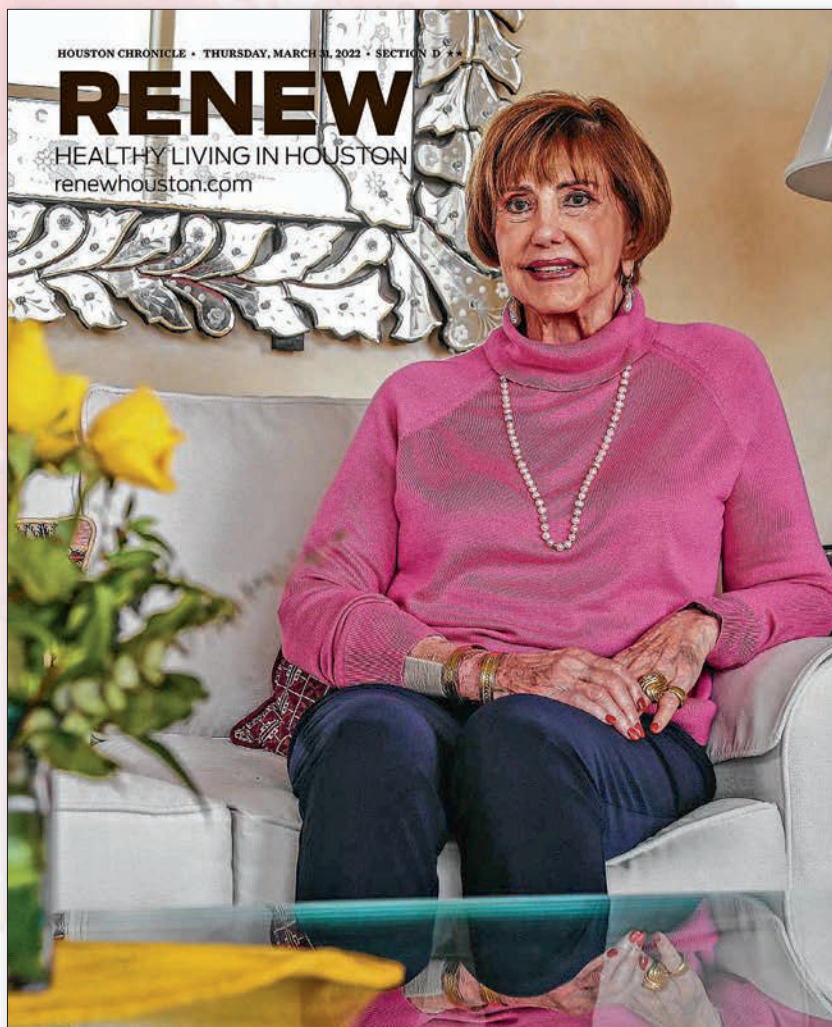
That’s when she discovered cryoablation.

“By the grace of God,” she learned from a friend’s neighbor about a doctor in California who was using cryoablation to eradicate breast tumors, she told *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah*. She asked a few questions, then called the doctor and sent him her medical records.

After getting the green light for the procedure, she “flew out, came back, no problems,” she said.

Cryoablation “is much less invasive than having your teeth cleaned,” she said. “There’s not even a stitch. You put your bra and shirt on and say, ‘Thank you.’”

In cryoablation, a needle is used to inject a gas into—and freeze—the tumor. The procedure takes about half an hour.



Cold comfort

New cancer treatment freezes tumors and lets them melt away

By Lindsay Peyton
CORRESPONDENT

When Helen Streaker first battled breast cancer, her options were limited — surgery and then radiation, the gold standard for treatment at the time.

It was an approach that left Streaker feeling wrecked after her mastectomy in 1993. She compared the surgery to “an amputation or mutilation.”

These days, Streaker, 87, has another less invasive option to treat the tumors that returned.

Cryoablation literally puts tumors in a deadly deep freeze — with no surgery, radiation or chemotherapy required.

Streaker has undergone the innovative treatment to remove her past two tumors — one in 2016 and



another last summer.

And on Jan. 25, Streaker became the first patient at Houston Methodist Hospital to undergo the procedure for breast cancer.

“This is my mission,” Streaker said of spreading the word about the therapy. “I want to tell people about this. It is my joy — but I also consider it my duty.”

Dr. Luz Vesta, Streaker’s doctor at Methodist, described the procedure in a simple way.

It’s almost exactly the same as performing a biopsy, said Vesta, who is medical director of the Houston Methodist Breast Care Center.

The ‘aha’ moment

When an additional breast tumor surfaced in 2016, Streaker was a patient at another hospital. She was informed that her age made her too high a risk for surgery. The same was true for chemotherapy.

Cancer continues on D6

Cancer patient Helen Streaker turned to cryoablation, which freezes tumors that then gradually thaw and dissolve into the body, to fight tumors in her breast. As the tumors thaw, they release antibodies that support the patient’s immune system.

Photos by Karen Warren / Staff photographer

FEELING MATTERS
Radical kindness can be a game changer. **Page 2**

WELL-BEING
A bad joke is raising awareness about alopecia. **Page 5**

FOOT HEALTH
Surgical procedure gets to the root of bunion issues. **Page 10**

“I’ve had worse mosquito bites, to tell the truth,” Streaker said. “You have it and you go to lunch.”

In fact, that is just what she did with her doctor in California.

Then, in 2021, a regular checkup at Houston Methodist Hospital revealed a new tumor. Doctors advised her to “watch and wait,” said the *Houston Chronicle*.

But she advocated cryoablation, citing studies showing its efficacy in tackling cancer like hers.

Streaker “gave her doctor a copy of a 2016 study from the National Institutes of Health [that]...describes success treating breast cancer” with cryoablation, the *Houston Chronicle* said. “The Phase 2 clinical trial showed successful ablation in 92 percent of the cases.”

Other studies also showed positive results.

Her physician, Dr. Luz Venta, head of Houston Methodist Hospital’s Breast Care Center, said the traditional manner of dealing with breast cancer is to view it “like an appendectomy,” she told the newspaper. “You have to take it out.”

But she said that thinking has changed recently and that cryoablation is now among a trifecta of strategies used to tackle breast and other cancers. The other tactics are immunology and surgery.

Dr. Venta said she was “enthusiastic about the role cryoablation could have in treating older patients who have more fragile health.”

Cryoablation “won’t put oncologists or surgeons out of business, but it’s an important new tool to fight cancer,” she told KHOU-TV in Houston last year.

“Whenever the age of fragility comes where any little knock knocks you down just a little bit, this is an option for saying: ‘Hey, we’re going to do something easy to tolerate that won’t knock you down even a little bit.’”

“The first thing that happens is the needle goes right through the cancer,” the doctor told a Denver TV station about the procedure. “Then the ice ball forms and we see this ice ball growing under ultrasound guidance or MRI guidance.



“First the cells die when you freeze them, and then when the ice ball melts—you don’t see it during the imaging procedure—but the cells pretty much break off and spill their antigens and that is the part that the immune system sees.”

At that point, the immune system “can fight them off” the Denver station said.

Dr. Venta “is currently opening a medical trial and starting to screen potential participants for cryoablation,” the *Houston Chronicle* said. “Ideal candidates include those who are at high risk for surgery, respond poorly to general anesthesia and have a breast tumor 1.5 centimeters or smaller.”

**“IT’S IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE DO
WEEKLY [BREAST] SELF-EXAMINATIONS.
FIND A TUMOR WHEN IT’S SMALL.
IT’S SO IMPORTANT!”**

“It’s important that people do weekly self-examinations,” Streaker said. “Find the tumor when it’s small. It’s so important!”

“People have been very interested” in learning about cryoablation, Streaker added, noting that “one lady who heard me speak at a church called and asked if I would speak at another church.”

“I’d like to give a gift of information,” she said, noting that Houston Methodist Hospital had asked her if she would be available for interviews.

She also looked back fondly on her time at Aramco when she spoke to *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah*.

Left: Streaker has spoken to groups in seven states about cryoablation. “I am passionate about not having unnecessary surgery,” she says. **Above:** A pink ribbon decorated a tree at the Houston Methodist Hospital Breast Center in in October 2022.



**“I INTENDED TO STAY
[AT ARAMCO] TWO YEARS.
THEN I PLANNED TO GO TO
GRAD SCHOOL TO BECOME A
PSYCHOLOGIST. I’M FASCINATED
BY THE POWER OF THE MIND.”**

When she arrived in Dhahran as Helen Carter 63 years ago, “I intended to stay two years,” Streaker said. “Then I planned to go to grad school to become a psychologist. I’m fascinated by the power of the mind.”

But she stayed, enjoying her work, her family and the community.

“I loved my teaching,” she said, noting that one highlight was taking her class to the TV station in Dhahran on a field trip in 1959. Then, three or four years ago, she met Heidi Knott, one of her students that year, who told her that the trip “had inspired my career” as a documentary producer.

“I loved my children in Arabia,” Streaker said.

The Streakers, who lived in Dhahran, Nariya and Abqaiq, had two children, Mark and Alice, both deceased. When they retired in 1984, they moved to Texas. They divorced in 1995 and Hal died in 1997.

Streaker has kept in touch with old friends at national and local reunions over the years. Her “by the grace of God” discovery of cryoablation, helped, no doubt, by the “power of the mind,” have kept her spirit—and her smile—strong.

“I don’t have cancer,” she said. “It’s totally gone.”



Counterclockwise from above: Streaker and her class of fifth-graders visited the TV station in Dhahran in 1959, the year she joined Aramco. As a 52-year-old in 1987, she skied into the “top-10” national amateur ranking for women age 50-59 in the U.S. The Streakers sat with their pets for their retirement photo in 1984.



Mahoney KEPT KEEN EYE ON Middle East

BY DAN NORTON

When John Mahoney joined Aramco in 1978, neither he nor the company had any idea his stay would be so brief, nor that he'd go on to lead Americans for Middle East Understanding (AMEU), an institution offering a critical perspective on issues affecting the region, in particular Palestine. He served as executive director of AMEU for 43 years, retiring last year at age 86.

Mahoney signed on with Aramco fresh off a three-year consulting assignment in New York with Catholic Near East Welfare Association, a humanitarian organization providing relief services in the Middle East, N.E. Africa, India and E. Europe. He joined Management Training in Dhahran, working for Bill O'Grady and teaching courses to hundreds of people throughout the company.

His wife, Sharon, and their children, Siobhan, eight, and Ryan, five, slipped easily into the lifestyle for young families: making friends, taking part in school activities, having fun at the pool, and making treks to al-Khobar, Dammam and Qatif.

On one occasion, the couple flew to Jiddah to participate in a dance contest. "Don't ask me how we fared," Mahoney quips.

Life was good until early in 1979, when Siobhan was diagnosed with a serious eye problem. She needed a cornea transplant, which the company's health system could not provide.

As a result, the Mahoneys were advised to move back to the U.S. While this marked the end of Mahoney's tenure with the company, the Aramco connection would return in important ways years later.

Back home in Darien, Conn., Siobhan's surgery was successful. During this period, Mahoney reconnected with an old friend, Dr. John Sutton, a Methodist minister and executive director of AMEU.

The group was formed in the 1967 by Americans working in Lebanon as architects, diplomats, and academics, among others, who felt the need to

Above: John Mahoney and his wife, Sharon, and their two children lived in Dhahran in the late 1970s. John went on to a 43-year career as executive director of Americans for Middle East Understanding, retiring in 2022.

provide fellow Americans with more accurate information on the Middle East and the plight of the Palestinians.

Sutton was retiring from AMEU and urged Mahoney to apply for his position. He got the job and for the next four decades worked relentlessly to dispel myths and stereotypes about Arabs, Muslims and the Israeli-Arab conflict.

His main engine was *The Link*, a bimonthly publication that has explored a single topic in depth in each issue since 1968. With articles written by experts on the Middle East and firsthand witnesses to history, including some Aramcons, it offers perspectives often missing in the mainstream press.

The Link is received by more than 900 colleges, high schools and libraries across the U.S., as well as a loyal list of subscribers. (To subscribe, visit www.ameu.org.)

Mahoney's career at AMEU had many highlights. One was working with Henry Fischer, an Egyptologist affiliated with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

One of the founders of AMEU, he had secured a gift that put organization on its feet. He served on the board of directors until his death in 2005.

Notably, Fischer was a primary driver behind saving Egypt's Temple of Dendur from the rising waters behind the Aswan High Dam. It was offered to the U.S. by the Egyptian government in appreciation of American aid in preserving Nubian monuments and Fischer persuaded President Lyndon B. Johnson to relocate it in the Met in 1967, where it became a focus.

Another highlight was getting to know Grace Halsell, an acclaimed writer and journalist who moved to Jerusalem in 1979 and lived with three families: Israeli settlers, Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians.

"The experience changed her life," Robin Kelly wrote in *The Link* in 2014. "... she was known as a thoughtful and committed advocate for social justice."

Macmillan, which published her book *Journey to Jerusalem* in 1981, did little to promote it, so AMEU bought the rights and sold more than 20,000 copies over the years.

Halsell served as a member of AMEU's board until her death in 2000.

John Mahoney, who worked in Management Training in Dhahran, coedited *Burning Issues: Understanding and Misunderstanding the Middle East: A 40-Year Chronicle*, a compilation of articles published in *The Link* that was printed in 2007.

A bequest from her estate was used to digitize AMEU's archives dating back to 1968.

As a nonprofit, AMEU relies on donors for support. For years, Aramco was the primary contributor.

Several former Aramcons stepped in as well. Retiree Bill Mulligan wrote a long article entitled "Military Peacekeeping in the Middle East" for *The Link* in 1983. Bob Norberg, former head of Aramco's Washington Office, joined AMEU's board of directors in 1995 following his retirement; he served as president from 2005 to 2015 and is now president emeritus.

Thanks to Norberg, every issue of *The Link* dating back

to its launch in 1968 can be viewed in the archive on the AMEU website. Norberg's son, Jeff, now serves as webmaster, posting each new issue.

Dick Hobson, formerly with Public Relations in Dhahran, served as AMEU treasurer for many years and is now a board member. My mom, annuitant Mary Norton, serves on the National Council, AMEU's advisory group. Brian Mulligan, son of retiree Ray Mulligan,

and I also serve on the board.

Mahoney, Bob Norberg and Jane Adas (AMEU board secretary) joined hands to edit the book *Burning Issues: Understanding and Misunderstanding the Middle East: A 40-Year Chronicle*. Comprised of articles published in *The Link*, it appeared in 2007.

In his last issue of *The Link*, published early last year, Mahoney wrote: "When I was in high school, I read a book on the Holocaust. What I mostly recall is a comment by a survivor of Auschwitz who said that what pained her most deeply was the thought that nobody outside the camp would ever know the hell they were going through much less care. My hope is Palestinians will see our archive as a witness to their catastrophe: that their suffering is known and that we do care."

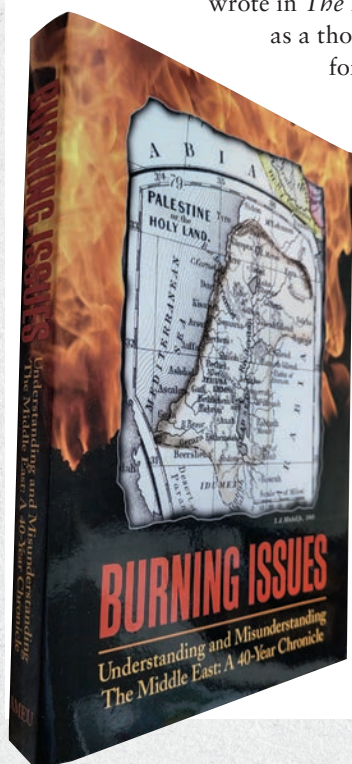
Upon his retirement, Mahoney became AMEU executive director emeritus. His successor, Nicholas Griffin, an old Middle East hand, plans to carry on AMEU's mission and expand its digital-media outreach.

Griffin and the board of directors have created the AMEU/ John F. and Sharon Mahoney Award for Service, an annual prize given to those who have made significant contributions to understanding, wellbeing and justice in the Middle East. Mahoney, who will remain on the board, says he wants to help "in any way I can."

But his legacy is already set in stone.

The archive he created offers a treasure trove of information about events in the Middle East over the past 75 years. Historians, reporters, human-rights advocates and others are invited to visit, to learn and to ponder what they might be able to do with what they find.

For Palestinians, the archive ensures that they are not forgotten as they continue their quest for just treatment that Mahoney has supported for so long.



EX-SCHOOLS' CHIEF
CELEBRATES
CYCLING
'GRADUATION'
BY TERRENCE WADE AND ARTHUR CLARK



Tim Hansen, who spent the majority of his 22-year company career as superintendent of schools in Dhahran, earned his own special “diploma” this spring when he rolled into retirement by biking across America.

“It was almost like graduation,” the 68-year-old said after completing the 3,100-mile journey from San Diego, Calif., to St. Augustine, Fla.

Rather than certificates like those presented to graduates from the Aramco Schools, he and fellow riders received medals after finishing their journey on roads connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

The ride took 52 days (March 12-May 2) with 45 days of actual biking. Thirty-five of the 40 riders who set out completed the journey.

Hansen got a crash course in camaraderie during the journey. The cyclists supported each other, “keeping people’s spirits up,” he said.

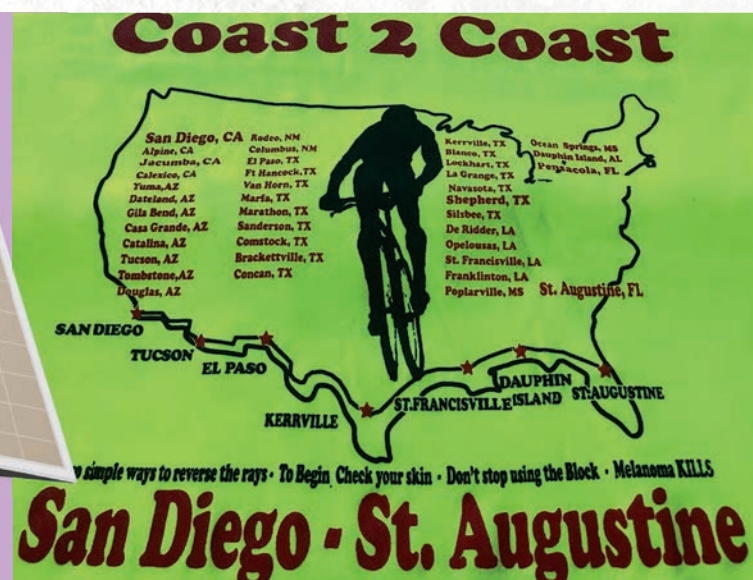
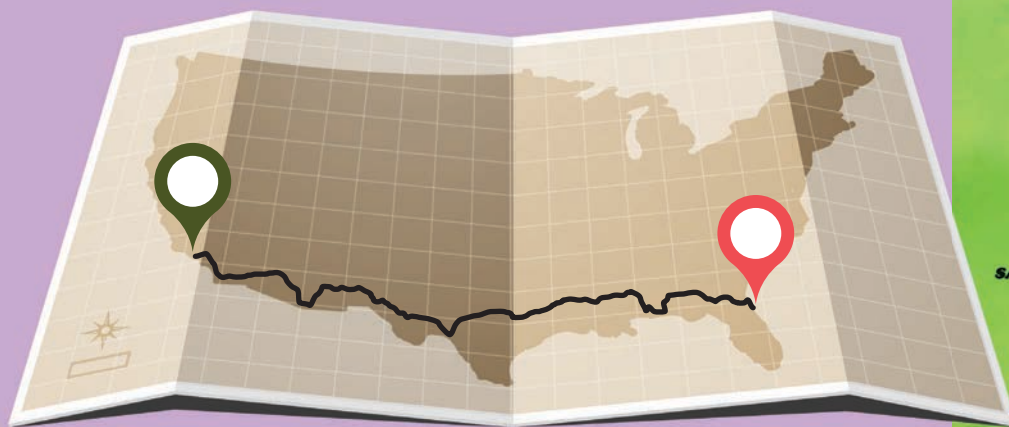
“We were able to do something unique. We took pictures of ourselves dipping our tires in the Atlantic on the last day.”

Hansen was superintendent of schools in Dhahran from 2000- ‘02 and 2007- ‘13; in between he headed Personnel. He moved to Aramco Services Company (today’s Aramco Americas) in Houston in 2013, leading Staffing Services for two years and then moving to Human Resources until he retired in February 2022.

His wife, Nancy, worked as a counsellor at the Hills School in Dhahran from 2000 to 2012.

She was “very supportive...a great cheerleader” during the cross-continental ride, he said, keeping in close touch from their home in Rosslyn, Va. “I’d finish a ride every

Clockwise from facing page: Tim Hansen poses in a patch of bluebells in Texas, halfway through his cross-country ride. He worked in Dhahran from 2000-’13, then relocated to Houston where he retired in 2022; long-horns looked on when he peddled through Texas; two maps—one from a T-shirt—outline the 3,100-mile ride.





Peddling panorama: Hansen traced his trip with photos at state borders. Crossing the mountains in western states like New Mexico was the “most physically demanding” part, while West Texas—“flat, hot, with a lot of wind”—was the toughest. He celebrated journey’s-end with a dip in the Pacific at St. Augustine, Fla.

day and she’d want to know as soon as possible that I was OK.”

The couple’s children, Kai, 35, and Jake, 25, also checked in with their dad.

“We communicated daily,” he said. “You need the support of other people to keep your spirits up. I got that from my family and a number of friends.”

Residents of communities along the way also provided support. “People in little towns were incredibly helpful,” offering water and advice, Hansen said.

Biking cross-country requires a “can-do” attitude.

“Not a lot of people do this kind of trip because it is kind of risky,” Hansen said. “We always wore safety vests and had blinking lights on our bikes to maintain high visibility.”

A lot of roads lacked shoulders. That was particularly tough in Georgia and Mississippi where there are many logging tracks.

Hansen called the journey a “team effort,” with riders motivating each other to keep going, especially on long, barren stretches of road in New Mexico and West Texas.

Hansen began dreaming of cycling across the U.S. when he was in Dhahran and heard about such a ride from two Aramcons who spoke at a self-directed-group meeting in 2011.

“I found the idea of seeing rural America from a bike seat interesting. It also sounded challenging,” Hansen said. “We saw things you wouldn’t see from a car or a plane.”

“I thought it would really be neat. But you can’t do it while working. It requires time and training.

“When it got closer to retirement, I said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

‘I’m just so thankful to have had this opportunity. It was a great adventure with memories that I will cherish.’

Hansen didn’t cycle before moving to Saudi Arabia. There, he rode and competed in several triathlons, including a Half-Iron Man. In that race, he swam 1.2 miles, cycled 56 miles and ran 13.1 miles.

In Dhahran, he owned a Giant road bike. For his ride across America, he rode a Trek gravel bike.

A mechanic traveled with the group for the entire ride, but Hansen made it with no trouble—not even a flat tire.

Hansen said a fellow Staffing Services employee, David Cobb, helped him get his dream off the drawing board after he arrived in Houston.

“Dave told me about a guy who directs these trips,” through Timberline Tours, Hansen said. He said Cobb, a long-distance cyclist himself, was “a real inspiration for me.”

In the runup to the ride, Hansen cycled 100-plus miles per week. When he retired last February, he traveled to Tucson, Ariz., to train in the hills for a couple of weeks.

The first part of the ride, over the mountains in California, Arizona and New Mexico, was the most physically demanding, but the toughest part of the trip was in West Texas. “It’s flat, dusty and hot, with a lot of wind, and there’s not much to look at,” Hansen said.

The group traveled mainly on country roads to stay away from traffic. One day each week over seven weeks, riders took a day off to rest and repair their bikes.

They averaged 70 miles per day, with actual distances ranging from 95 to 50 miles, depending on the terrain.

About two-thirds of the time, they slept in tents at remote



campgrounds. Sometimes, the cyclists slept in school gyms or community centers. Occasionally, they stayed in budget motels.

A support team traveled by truck with the group. It carried gear and set up and broke down each camp, cooked breakfast and dinner and arranged lunch.

Hansen learned a lot about his fellow riders on the road.

"There was a sense of coherence in the group" that developed over time, he said. "We needed each other and we grew together. You realize just how wonderful people can be."

"And it's not just the riders," he said. "The people you meet in little towns [in Texas] like Marfa, Van Horne, Lockhart and La Grange were incredibly helpful and kind. It helps you appreciate how wonderful people can be."

Hansen said he was among the older riders in the group, which had an average age "in the low 60s."

He said the cyclists felt a sense of "we can do this" once they reached the half-way point of the ride: Kerrville, Texas.

"So many things can go wrong on a trip like this," he said. "[You wonder] is my bike going to hold up, am I going to stay healthy?"

No more long-distance bike rides are on Hansen's horizon right now, but he says he enjoys cycling on bike paths in Virginia and Georgetown, just across the Potomac River in Washington, D.C. And he and his wife have Segway electric scooters that they take out for spins.

Like graduates the world over, Hansen appreciates the friends he made on the road to his special achievement.

"I'm just so thankful to have had this opportunity," Hansen said. "It was a great adventure with good memories that I will cherish."



PLEASANT DAYS WINTER 2023

Al~Ayyam Al~Jamilah الأيام الجميلة

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ARTHUR CLARK

'It was Fun!' says Youngest Haflawi

Eight-year-old Nathaniel Edoo, shown with his father, Louis, and the staff of the "Camp at Sea" for kids, was youngest attendee at the 32nd biennial Annuitants Reunion, held aboard the *Celebrity Summit* in the Caribbean Oct. 31-Nov. 5. Nathaniel attended the Hafla with his parents, from England, and his grandfather, annuitant Everard Edoo, from Aruba, who worked as an inspection engineer in Ras Tanura, Dhahran, Abqaiq, Berri, Hawiyah, Khurais, Haradh, 'Udhailiyah, Safaniya and Tanajib from 2002-'12.