

## [Business & Industrial Connection](#)

- [Alliance](#)
- [IVS](#)
- [Publishing](#)



- [Home](#)
- [Media Kit](#)
- [Members](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Back Issues](#)
- [Contact](#)

## Calendar of Events

< [February 2009](#) >

S M T W T F S  
 1 [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) 7  
 8 [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#) [13](#) [14](#)  
[15](#) [16](#) [17](#) [18](#) [19](#) 20 21  
[22](#) [23](#) [24](#) [25](#) [26](#) [27](#) [28](#)

## Search BIC Members

 

### **ExxonMobil refinery manager uses diverse background to face challenges**

- By Anna Matherne
- Volume 26 Number 1
- Sun 02/01



“The global economy” is the term businesses use to describe the ability to market products and services all over the globe and has become essential for success in today’s business. When management can integrate their own global experiences into their leadership role, they can provide growth, profit and sustainability for the organization.

Originally from Kansas, ExxonMobil Baton Rouge, La., Refinery Manager Steve Blume knows a thing or two about working in a global economy. He started his career in 1980 with Mobil in Dallas, and later received his MBA from the University of Texas, Arlington by taking night classes. Since then, his career has varied. By holding a variety of jobs such as working in pipeline, supply, marketing and planning, Blume became a manager of U.S. pipeline operations prior to the Exxon and

Mobil merger. He then became a technical manager at the ExxonMobil Singapore refinery for a while before becoming the Singapore refinery manager in 2003. After spending seven years in Singapore, Blume took his current role in August 2008.

### **What it takes to be a leader**

As a leader, Blume feels that staying interactive within the plant helps to drive it in the right direction. He regularly performs walkabouts and spends time in the plant, talking to employees about safety and reliability.

“I want to maintain operations excellence,” he said. “We want to focus on safety, reliability and operating costs to optimize the plant and remain competitive.”

But being a good leader doesn't come naturally to everyone. Blume believes there are four skills needed to become a successful leader:

1. Good people skills — That is making sure that you're able to attract the best people, develop the best and get the most out of your people. It also requires you to motivate people.
2. Listening is critical.
3. Align the organization to have its plans in place — to know what the company is going to accomplish.

“A lot of organizations are very good about developing plans — making a vision, knowing what they're going to try to achieve — but I think it goes a step further, and that's being able to get the organization to do something and make things happen,” said Blume.

4. Hold people accountable and support their actions.

“You've got to have quality people you can count on who know they're there to deliver results whether it's safety, reliability or energy performance. Whatever it may be, you must hold them accountable to deliver those results,” said Blume. “You should coach them along the way. If they have issues, work through them. Make sure you take any hurdles or obstacles that they have and minimize or alleviate those so they can achieve the business results that you set.

“I've been fortunate enough to have a good, broad leadership background to help me have a broad business perspective, which I find to be very helpful,” he said.

### **Facing new challenges**

Overall, the biggest challenge for Blume in any leadership role has been figuring out how to adapt to a specific organization's culture and how to change his leadership style to best fit the culture.

“All organizations are different,” he said. “Whether it's where their safety mindset is, their reliability mindset may be or the experience level of the organization, I have to be able to read the organization and to adapt and change my leadership skills to best fit the situation.”

According to Blume, although his career is diverse, one of his most recent challenges was dealing with Hurricane Gustav in September 2008.

“My effective date at this plant was Aug. 1 — Gustav hit Sept. 1 — and I think I had just figured out where the cafeteria was,” he said jokingly. “It was a very unique challenge for me because I was just

getting to know the organization and the plant and so I had to depend largely on the management team and the rest of the organization.

“This is a very strong organization and they did a wonderful job,” said Blume. “Working as a team and with our partners, we safely returned the plant to operation fairly quickly.”

### **Focusing on safety**

By having a strong safety system and thorough procedures in place, Blume is constantly making sure the initiatives the site has are driving it in the right direction.

“My top priority is what we call operations excellence or the flawless operations of this plant, so I focus on process safety, personal safety, reliability and the operating costs of the plant,” he said.

“Additionally, the management team has the responsibility to optimize the plant. I spend lots of time in the plant talking and listening to the people to understand the current situation of the plant and the opportunities for improvement.”

According to Blume, ExxonMobil’s Baton Rouge facility has a reasonably good safety and environmental record. The company’s focus is on having strong people, systems and procedures in place.

“Achieving good environmental performance is an everyday task,” said Blume. “Starting with just making sure all our equipment is operating well, to taking a proactive approach to reduce our emissions by making our environmental stewardship a top priority. The objective to improve energy efficiency is not only good for the environment but also good for the plant.”

The proactive approach works well for the Baton Rouge facility, which has one of the lowest flaring rates within ExxonMobil.

“When it comes to safety we must engage the people. We work with our employees and contractors to build the right people behavior,” said Blume. “It’s important for all our employees and contractors to think about what they are going to do and perform last-minute assessments of the situation before they start any task by thinking about any hazards of the task and how to mitigate those hazards and do the work safely so that they don’t get injured on the job. Our vision is ‘Nobody Gets Hurt.’”

### **Growth, expansion**

In December, ExxonMobil Refining & Supply announced its investment of more than \$1 billion in three refineries — including the Baton Rouge refinery — to increase the supply of cleaner burning diesel by about 6 million gallons per day. The other facilities include Baytown, Texas, and Antwerp, Belgium.

“ExxonMobil, and in our case, the Baton Rouge Refinery, is committed to the constant improvement of our operations with the development of advanced energy technologies,” said Blume. “We are pleased to be progressing this project as it will reduce emissions and increase supplies of ultra low sulfur diesel to meet the growing worldwide demand for this fuel.”

By 2010, the refineries’ modifications and expansions are expected to be complete — increasing production of diesel with sulfur of 15 parts per million or less.

### **Community involvement**

At a time when everyone seems to be focusing on business and the economy, the ExxonMobil Baton Rouge refinery knows that being neighbors means more than just sharing the same location. To the

plant, being a good neighbor means “caring about the safety, prosperity and appearance of the shared neighborhood.”

The Baton Rouge facility participates in several different activities in the community. Through their Ambassadors Committed to Education (ACE) and ExxonMobil Community Outreach Team (EMCOT) programs, volunteers partner with local schools to foster students’ interest in math and science. Volunteers also support Junior Achievement, which the company has helped out with since its inception in Baton Rouge. Other volunteer activities in education include working with the area teachers to further their career through classroom grants, networking and training.

“We are strong supporters of science and math because it’s critical to our industry,” said Blume. “We work very closely with the East Baton Rouge Parish school system to build excitement among the students to study science and math and become engineers.”

One thing that makes ExxonMobil stand apart is the Volunteer Involvement Program, which awards a \$500 grant to an organization after a team of at least five eligible participants (or an individual) volunteer for a combined total of at least 20 hours on a specific project during a calendar year.

Another employee volunteer program is the ExxonMobil Community Involvement Through Employees (ExC!TE). ExC!TE members are the ExxonMobil Baton Rouge area employees, retirees, their family members and friends who are committed to the Baton Rouge community. The program has recorded more than 40,000 volunteer hours in 2008.

### **Focusing on family**

In his spare time, Blume watches and coaches his four sons who are all involved in sports. He also enjoys spending time with his family by taking trips — something he believes is important in maintaining healthy family relationships.

“We were fortunate enough to take trips to China, Thailand, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Australia,” he said. “We really haven’t had the opportunity to show the kids the United States, so now we want to take some time to do that. I really just try to spend as much time as I can with my family.”

Blume also makes time in his day to read the news on the Internet — both locally and worldwide. Blume keeps up to date with news by reading several industry-related publications as well as reading information on ExxonMobil’s Intranet.

“The world is changing, and I believe it is important to stay on top of what’s going on,” he said.

When looking at the road ahead, Blume’s main goal for the Baton Rouge refinery is to leave the refinery in better shape than when he came to it.

“That means better safety performance, reliability and efficiency.” he said. “But more importantly, in the end I want the organization to be stronger when I leave than when I came — from the people, programs and strategies to development and growth.”

Copyright © 2007 The BIC Alliance

Developed by GatorWorks