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BUSINESS Thursday, Jun 25, 2009

## Business

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# Shlachter & Co.: Business is good for Fort Worth maker of controls for firefighter plane

The Air Tractor aircraft company of Olney made a splash with its planes at the recent Paris Air Show, but there's another local angle to that story.

Trotter Control of Fort Worth makes a patented control system that Air Tractor's model AT802F, an air tanker, uses in firefighting. Trotter Control's mechanism allows the precise application of water or fire retardant from the plane.

"We know hydraulics, circuit board design and industrial controls," said Victor Trotter, president and chief technical officer. "We know a lot about robotics. If a person has a hard problem, we can usually come up with a solution."

A photo of Air Tractor's Fire Boss model, equipped with pontoons and a system for scooping water into the plane, appeared in a recent *Star-Telegram* report about Air Tractor. Trotter recently sent technicians from his staff of 15 to Spain, Chile and Australia to provide service and training for the fire retardant delivery system.

"We're an engineering company that produces products," Trotter said, adding that business is good. "We haven't seen the recession yet."

### A winner from Dallas

The winner of a downtown Fort Worth contest, who had to find 24 signs that contained letters posted on a Web site, has been announced. And it took a person from Dallas to nail them all.

Jennifer Bell will receive more than \$800 in gifts and

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services from local businesses, according to [www.downtownfortworth.com](http://www.downtownfortworth.com). The independent group is not affiliated with Downtown Fort Worth Inc.

This time around, the contest gave away a second-place prize valued at \$100. This went to Michael and Donna Hornsby, who were last year's top winner, it said.

### Barnett Shale rules

Last week, Chesapeake Energy Chairman Aubrey McClendon told a Fort Worth audience that the Barnett Shale of North Texas has surpassed the San Juan Basin of northwestern New Mexico and Colorado as the biggest natural gas producer in the United States.

At the time, the Energy Department couldn't confirm McClendon's assessment, which he said was based on Chesapeake's data. The department would say only that it appeared that the Barnett and San Juan are "probably running neck and neck" in production.

But Steve Grape, a manager in the department's Dallas office, told the *Star-Telegram* this week that "it looks like Aubrey McClendon is right."

Grape based his conclusion on a "preliminary analysis" of 2008 production data that the Energy Information Administration, an agency in the Energy Department, buys from a commercial firm. The EIA plans to release a report in early September, he said.

### Got a noisy well?

Barnett Shale natural gas producers, drilling contractors and well-servicing firms, take note.

If some of the gas wells you're drilling or fracturing are behaving badly by making too much noise and potentially violating city ordinances, the Environmental and Natural Resources Group says it might have the answer for you.

The Farmers Branch-based firm said this week that it had launched "the oil and gas industry's first real-time, Web-based noise monitoring service" that "provides drillers and operators with 24-hour access . . . to well noise data." The service alerts operators via cellphone text messages or e-mail "if their operation's noise levels exceed city ordinance compliance levels," the company said.

Among its customers are two Fort Worth-based independent natural gas and oil exploration and production firms, XTO Energy and Range Resources.

Jason Churchill, an XTO operations engineer, said the most desirable feature of the system "is the rapid notification process and availability of the live data via the Internet . . . demonstrating whether or not we [are] within the city's noise limits."

Range Resources' regulatory manager, Mary Patton, said: "As a result of using the ENRG noise-monitoring technology, we were able to quickly react to a noise-complaint situation. Instead of waiting 24 to 48 hours for a sound study as we'd typically done in the past, we were able to determine instantly that we were actually in compliance with the local city noise ordinance." Company officials fired off an e-mail verifying compliance to the city and avoided the expense of installing a sound wall, she said.

Information about ENRG's service is available at [www.enrgconsultants.com/nmt.html](http://www.enrgconsultants.com/nmt.html).

### In food we trust

Metroplex residents are more trusting of grocery manufacturers and supermarkets than other urban dwellers when it comes to food safety, according to a survey sponsored by IBM.

But a higher percentage of Dallas-Fort Worth residents — 57 percent, compared with the average of 49 percent in nine other metro areas — say they've stopped buying a product for safety reasons in the past two years, even for a short time, according to the survey. By comparison, 44 percent of Philadelphians did so.

A whopping 83 percent of Metroplex folks say they trust their grocery retailer when handling a recall of contaminated food. The average was 72 percent. Only 60 percent of New Yorkers felt so confident.

And 69 percent of urban North Texans believe that food manufacturers would handle a recall correctly, compared with an average of 55 percent, down from 64 percent in 2007.

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The survey of 1,000 people this month had an overall margin of error of 3.1 percentage points.

### Local TopGun CEOs

Fort Worth-based exploration and production companies are represented not once, but twice, on Brendan Wood International's list of 25 U.S. "TopGun Chief Executive Officers" recently published in *Forbes* magazine.

XTO Energy CEO Keith Hutton was praised for his leadership at a company cited as "one of the best long-term growth stories in the sector." Range Resources Chairman and CEO John Pinkerton "has done a fabulous job in terms of putting together a world-class asset base and executing very well upon that base," the *Forbes* article said.

Brendan Wood, a global intelligence-based advisory firm, said it solicited the opinions of 2,500 professional asset managers.

### Join the discussion

The Fort Worth Star-Telegram is pleased to provide this opportunity for you to share your thoughts and observations about news topics. We enjoy lively debate on the issues of the day, but we ask that you refrain from using profanity, racist or hate speech, making personal attacks, posting advertising or including remarks that are off topic. To post comments, you must be a registered user of Star-Telegram.com. Your username will show along with the comments you post. Thank you for taking the time to offer your thoughts.

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