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## FOCUS ON OIL & GAS

### RAYMOND J. STAPELL

Prior to joining Harris Beach, Mr. Stapell served as General Counsel for a large drilling and oil and gas production company. At the time, Universal Resources Holdings, Inc. was the second largest drilling and production company in the Northern Appalachian basin (consisting of western New York, western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia). During this period of 1977 through 1982, the company drilled approximately 150 wells per year and leased over 12,000 acres in New York and Pennsylvania.

As General Counsel, Mr. Stapell worked on a wide range of legal and business issues including lease acquisitions, landowner disputes and negotiations, contract negotiations with natural gas companies and pipelines, environmental compliance involving state regulatory agencies, drilling contracts, vendor contracts for service rig providers, gas sale contracts, oil sale contracts, pipeline rights of way, and various types of litigation. He also selected and supervised all outside counsel that the company utilized for its various legal services not covered in-house.

An additional area of experience covered both general and limited drilling partnerships. The company had two principal sources of funding. The first source was funds derived from the drilling of wells for various outside general and limited partnerships. In this situation, Mr. Stapell was responsible for well-drilling contracts and area development contracts (known as Areas of Mutual Interest or AMI's) with these outside entities as well as tending contracts for their programs once the wells were drilled and placed into production. The second source of funds was from in-house general and limited partnerships. With these programs, he was the actual managing partner or general partner (in the case of limited partnerships) for groups of investors. In this capacity, Mr. Stapell dealt with SEC and state security laws and regulations regarding exempt offerings, overall business plans and projections, daily management of the drilling programs, distributions of monthly proceeds, and investor relationships.

### ALAN J. LAURITA

Envirogas Inc. was one of several oil and gas companies Mr. Laurita worked with from 1974 through 1981, while practicing law in Mayville, New York. During that time he completed title work and represented Envirogas in several mortgage transactions where wells, or fractional interests in wells, were used as collateral. Mr. Laurita also worked on various real estate transactions and in real property assessment hearings.

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During that time period, he also successfully represented L.O.G.I.C. Inc. (Land Owners with Gas Interests and Concerns, New York's only association of land owners involved in the oil and gas industry) in challenging the method by which New York assessed and taxed gas well interests.

In January, 1982 Mr. Laurita joined Envirogas Inc. and worked there until the company ceased doing business in 1996. Envirogas was a large, privately-owned, independent oil and gas company with approximately 1,650 wells primarily in the northern Appalachian Basin. Mr. Laurita served as Senior Vice President and was one of the four members of the board of directors. While he joined Envirogas as an attorney, his role expanded and he became involved in many aspects of the company's business. Some of Mr. Laurita's activities and responsibilities included:

- Supervision of the land department;
- Coordination of all drilling operations;
- Performing all necessary title work;
- Acting as the contact person and dealing with state regulatory agencies including the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and the New York State Public Service Commission;

- Supervision of gas marketing activities including acting as president of an affiliated gas marketing company;
- Representing the company in compulsory integration hearings before the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as both an applicant and respondent;
- Negotiating and representing the company in purchase, sale, and mortgage transactions involving wells, fractional interests in wells, undeveloped acreage, and real estate;
- Negotiating resolutions of various disputes that arose with other oil and gas companies, including those involved in transactions with the company;
- Supervision and oversight of outside counsel involved in litigation with landowners and/or other companies;
- Representing the company in real property tax assessment hearings;
- Acting as the principal and president of an affiliated broker/dealer involved in raising drilling capital through limited partnership offerings.

During Mr. Laurita's time with Harris Beach, he has completed work for several oil and gas companies including currently doing most of the New York title work for U.S. Energy Development Corporation.



**For more information on  
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