

Hockstra leaving Texas Operations

By JOHN TOMPKINS | Posted: Tuesday, August 30, 2011 2:00 am

FREEPORT - Dow's Texas Operations experienced trying times under Gary Hockstra's leadership, but the Freeport site emerged from an economic slump to expected expansions in the near future.

Area officials said he served as an integral part of his community, supporting local nonprofit organizations, local businesses and was a strong leader for the area's largest employer.

Dow Chemical announced Monday morning that Hockstra will leave Texas Operations to be the company's vice president of manufacturing, engineering and environmental health and safety for the Dow Advanced Materials Division in Philadelphia.

Earl Shipp, the current vice president and site director of Dow Michigan Operations, will take over Texas Operations, the largest petrochemical site in North America.

"Leading Texas Operations has been one of the highlights of my Dow career," Hockstra said in a Dow news release. "It was a privilege to work with such an outstanding group of employees, retirees and community stakeholders every day. I'm going to really miss working at this site, but I'm very excited to be a part of Dow Advanced Materials."

Hockstra led the Texas Operations site effectively and several expansions were planned while he was there, Dow Advanced Materials President and CEO Jerome Peribere said in the release.

"I am certain that with his experience and leadership, he will help our division meet our aggressive goals and help transform Dow into a truly market-driven company," Peribere said.

It is not known when Hockstra will hand over the reins to Shipp, Dow spokeswoman Trish Ritthaler said.

"There will definitely be a transition period as he learns the site," she said.

Hockstra was traveling and not available for comment Monday, Ritthaler said. Shipp also was not available for comment, she said.

'Fantastic opportunity'

Hockstra became site director at Texas Operations in December 2007 after former director Bob Walker took a position at Dow's Midland, Mich., offices. Before becoming site director, Hockstra was manager of the company's engineering polymers division.

Hockstra started working with Dow Chemical in 1980 in research and development. He moved to Texas Operations in 1996 as the light hydrocarbons technology leader.

Hockstra now will oversee production of materials used in many consumer electronics, Ritthaler said.

"This is a fantastic opportunity to move into the Advanced Materials division," she said.

Shipp started his Dow Chemical career in 1981 at Texas Operations and has served many positions in manufacturing, Ritthaler said. He left Texas Operations in 1985 and later worked at Dow locations in Texas, Missouri, Ohio and the United Arab Emirates before becoming head of Dow's Michigan Operations.

Shipp also once was chair of the Federal Reserve Bank's New Orleans branch in Atlanta and is a member of the Federal Reserve's Energy Advisory Committee.

Hockstra steered Texas Operations through the economic crash of 2008-09, which forced Dow to shut some of its plants and lay off many contractors. Hockstra said in April that business is returning to the site and the company intends to add 200 jobs this year.

A new chlo-alkali plant project also started moving forward during Hockstra's tenure. The plant is set to begin operating in 2013. Hockstra announced in April that Texas Operations will see new projects including a world-scale, all-purpose propylene production facility to start up in 2015.

Hockstra was fair with the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 564 to develop the union contract last December , union business manager Charlie Singletary said.

"Negotiations went really well," Singletary said. "We developed a strong relationship with him."

Community advocate

Hockstra chairs the Economic Development Alliance of Brazoria County. The board will elect a new chair at the end of September, said Robert Worley, CEO of the alliance.

"It's going to be hard shoes to fill," Worley said. "He's a fine man. He's a consummate professional."

Brazosport Area Chamber of Commerce President Sandra Shaw said Hockstra played an important role for the area, and he led Texas Operations effectively during turbulent times.

"Things are looking good for Dow Chemical Co., which in turn will be good for our community," she said.

Hockstra was an advocate for Brazosport College, lobbying state legislators to restore the college's funding during the past legislative session, college President Millicent Valek said. He also served on an advisory committee for the school's process technology program. Hockstra and his wife, Ruth, were chairs for the Scholarship Soiree that raised about \$400,000, the most ever for the event.

"Gary has been an exceptional supporter of higher education, especially Brazosport College," Valek said.