

Shipp to command Dow's Texas sites

By JOHN TOMPKINS | Posted: Sunday, September 4, 2011 2:00 am

FREEPORT — Dow Texas Operations' new chief will be a strong leader who believes in building strong community involvement, said those who know and have worked with him.

Earl Shipp will return to Freeport to head up the same location where he started his Dow career in 1981.

“With Earl's past business and geographic roles, coupled with his most recent experience at Michigan Operations, he will continue the focus in Texas Operations on our people, our communities and on operational excellence,” Dow Executive Vice President of Manufacturing and Engineering Carol Williams said in a news release.

Shipp declined to comment for this story because he wants to settle in at Freeport and get familiar with his new position, Dow spokeswoman Trish Ritthaler said.

In a statement to the Bay City Times in Michigan this week, Shipp said he will miss being head of Michigan Operations and that Dow must cultivate strong ties to the regions where the company operates.

“Dow has been a catalyst for bringing Saginaw, Bay City and Midland (Mich.) together, and I am very proud to have been a part of this effort,” Shipp states. “There is no question that the success of Dow is contingent upon the success of the community in which we operate.”

On Monday, Dow Chemical announced Texas Operations site director Gary Hockstra would move to the company's Advanced Materials Division in Philadelphia. Shipp will leave Dow's Michigan Operations to take over the Freeport site. It is not known how long the transition will take.

The announcement was abrupt but leadership changes often are not “pre-announced,” Hockstra said.

“That's a huge challenge right now is what to do and when,” he said. “I will phase out of my old role and be placed into my new role over the next couple of weeks and months.”

DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

Those who know Shipp and worked with him while he headed up Dow Michigan Operations say he will be an asset to the community.

“Earl has a great persona,” said Jimmy Greene, CEO of Associated Builders and Contractors, which trains contractors for Dow. “It's all about balance.”

Shipp has an ability to be serious when it's required and yet display a sense of humor about it, Greene said.

The new Texas Operations chief also has worked around the globe at different Dow sites, including Africa and the Middle East, which required him to understand and work with different cultures.

“To be successful at it certainly shows a strength at building relationships,” Greene said. “It’s amazing.”

Shipp’s predecessor said the new site leader will be a perfect fit for Texas Operations.

“He’s a very good, good leader,” Hockstra said. “He’s had a large number of different experiences.”

Shipp started his Dow Chemical career in 1981 at Texas Operations. He left in 1985 and later worked at Dow locations in Texas, Missouri, Louisiana, Ohio, Africa and the United Arab Emirates.

He was president of Dow’s India, Middle East & Africa division before becoming head of Dow’s Michigan Operations.

“He brings a global perspective to his communities,” said Scott Walker, CEO of Midland Tomorrow, an economic development corporation. “That is always useful.”

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.

While working in Michigan, Shipp volunteered with the Saginaw Valley African-American Leadership Training Institute, which mentors young African-American students. Shipp will become Texas Operations’ first African-American vice president and site director in the almost 70 years it has been operating.

Economic Development Alliance of Brazoria County CEO Robert Worley said he has no doubt Shipp will transition easily into the same level of community involvement as Hockstra.

“Dow Chemical has a history of putting good people in that position,” Worley said.

Shipp also will effectively lead Texas Operations through upcoming expansions, the company has said.

“I am thrilled to have this type of leadership in such an important and growing facility,” Williams said in Dow’s news release.

Texas Operations union workers hope Shipp will be as successful as Hockstra when it comes to the site’s relationship with its operators. Shipp’s involvement in the communities where he has worked is a positive sign, union business manager Charlie Singletary said.

“If he cares about his community, then he’ll care about his people,” Singletary said.

HARD TO LEAVE HOME

After leading one of the largest petrochemical complexes in North America, Hockstra said he is looking forward to something smaller that at the same time could have a bigger impact for the company. In the past two years, Dow has made a push to become a specialty chemicals maker.

“Advanced Materials is an area where Dow has a very strong focus,” Hockstra said. “It’s key to our strategy to invest in specialties.”

He has lived in Lake Jackson since 1996. During that time, he became a community leader in commerce, education and other fields.

“He was just so active,” Worley said. “The guy was just everywhere.”

Hockstra said he will miss the relationships he and his family have built in the Brazosport area over the past 15 years.

“It’s been incredibly precious for us,” he said. “There are lifetime friends that we’ve made here.”

Leading the Freeport site was a great opportunity and it will be an experience that will remain with him as he moves on.

“That’s been one of the most rewarding things of my entire career,” Hockstra said.

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