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In 2011, Diamond Offshore contracted with Hyundai Heavy Industries to build a state-of-the-art, ultra-deep-water drillship—a 754-foot marvel of modern drilling technology that was christened the Ocean BlackHawk. Over the following months the company ordered three more drillships of the same design, the Ocean BlackHornet, Ocean BlackRhino

and Ocean BlackLion. The systems on these 6th-generation vessels are among the most advanced ever seen in the drilling industry. Diamond Offshore would have to find very specialized individuals to work these massive ships, and a lot of them, in a short timeframe. The company had never undertaken a crewing challenge of this magnitude or complexity

LION'S PRIDE

A CREW COMPLETE

“MANY PEOPLE IMMEDIATELY SAW IT AS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO BE ON A RIG OF THE FUTURE, WHICH MAKES FOR A MORE INTERESTING AND MORE SECURE JOB.”

Now the job is almost finished. The first three drillships are crewed up and working in the Gulf of Mexico, leaving only the *BlackLion* to be finalized. With many of Diamond Offshore’s best people already working the first three ships, crewing the fourth was the toughest challenge of all. But if you ask anyone onboard, they’re liable to inform you that the best of the best, just perhaps, were saved for last.

On May 26th the *Ocean BlackLion* fired up her engines and became the fourth Diamond Offshore newbuild drillship to leave Ulsan, South Korea, in its wake. Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) shipyard had completed the build and turned the keys over to Diamond Offshore. At long last, the vessel was in the capable hands of the newly minted BlackLion crew. But before this moment could happen, one must travel back in time about four years, when the new drillships were more blueprints on paper than iron in a shipyard.

Karen Roll is Manager of Staffing Services for Diamond Offshore. When the announcement was first made that the company would be building new drillships, her position was created. The challenge placed before Roll and her

team—find more than 800 exceptionally qualified people, about 206 per ship, and get them ready to operate these new rigs as soon as they’re built and delivered. The apparent first step was to start at home.

“We are very much a promote-from-within company, so we got most of our people internally,” says Roll. “The first thing we did was send a message out to the whole fleet that said, ‘If you’re interested in working on one of the new drillships, please complete this one-page questionnaire.’ “ The questionnaire was simple, asking why the applicant should be considered and what special skills he or she would bring to successfully operating a 6th-gen vessel. The response? Roll cocks her thumb at a stack of completed questionnaires standing two feet high in the corner of her office. “The interest was very high. We got more questionnaires back than we needed. Many people immediately saw it as a great opportunity to be on a rig of the future, which makes for a more interesting and more secure job.”

Next, each completed questionnaire was paired with the applicant’s CV, and all of this information was pushed out electronically to the rig managers, so they

could see the pool of talent that was available for each key position. For many Diamond Offshore personnel, the timing of this call for applicants couldn’t have been better. The company was in the process of taking some of its older rigs out of service and selling off others. The crews on those rigs were facing an uncertain future when that questionnaire hit their inbox.

“With some of our rigs going down, we wanted to make sure we did not lose good talent,” says Roll. “So we did everything in our power to retain them. We tried to approach the crewing challenge from a big-picture perspective, but this is difficult because things are constantly and quickly changing, especially right now. One minute a rig is moving to a new country, another is being cold stacked, another is being sold, another is coming out of the shipyard. So we deal with this by using only the most current information and addressing the most immediate need.”

BALANCING ACT

Although Roll’s job was created to respond to personnel needs on the drillships, her responsibilities reach out to every rig Diamond Offshore



KAREN ROLL
Manager of Staffing Services



owns. Her team has to make sure that during the crewing process, the experience and skill levels are still balanced across the entire working fleet. Imagine you're a coach on a winning team, and suddenly you're told that you will be losing all your best players. Diamond Offshore wasn't going to do that to rig managers who were out there working hard for current clients.

"There was some hand picking of people, but we have to referee that," says Roll. "We couldn't allow any rig to be stripped of the good talent it needs to operate. Those managers wanted to

protect their good people. So every request for a drillship position had to go to the Operations VP level to make sure the transfer would not leave a serious talent void. We tried to maintain a balance, but crewing the drillships was a company priority, so good people had to go to them. We didn't want to take too much experience away from working rigs, but we also couldn't send all new people to the ships."

While the majority of drillship crewmembers came from within, outside recruitment was necessary as well because Diamond Offshore was

entering virgin territory, operating drillships versus traditional rigs. Each ship requires eight crewmembers who hold the full Coast Guard unlimited ABS license. No other Diamond Offshore rig has this requirement, so they were all outside hires.

Stuart Utting is Operations Manager for the *Ocean BlackLion*. He says that while Diamond Offshore has traditionally been a popular employer in the offshore industry, finding these outside people was not easy. "For the new hires, we had to get the word out in the market and advertise that we were looking for good people,



particularly in the engineering and marine departments, which are positions that hold special licenses. These people are in very high demand because there are many dynamically positioned type vessels being built right now. But we've been able to attract some great people."

Being the fourth drillship to be crewed, the *BlackLion* may appear to be at a disadvantage in securing the best people out there. On the contrary, being fourth has some distinct benefits over the others. Building and crewing the first ship, and to some degree the second and third, were pure learning

process. By the time HHI began to cut steel for the *BlackLion*, Diamond Offshore had already worked through the surprises, challenges and growing pains, and now pretty much had the crewing process down cold.

The first three ships were also a perfect training ground for personnel who were being groomed to move to the *BlackLion*. Several key positions on these vessels were strategically overstaffed. For example, six subsea hands were hired to work on the *BlackHawk*, knowing that two of them would go to the *BlackHornet* and two to the *BlackLion*. This purposeful

cascading of crewmembers was vital on several fronts says Utting. "We put people earmarked for the *BlackLion* on the other ships very early. They were there during the building phases and into delivery, commissioning, integration testing and finally the full-on drilling operations. They are being trained up with the express purpose of bringing that experience to this ship. This has made it much easier to guide the *BlackHawk* through all of those same phases, from building to drilling."

BUILD THE SHIP, BUILD THE CREW

While the ultimate crew count for the *BlackLion* encompasses more than 200 people, the buildup to that number was deliberately restrained. In short, the right people were brought in at the right time during the building process. This allowed key personnel to be involved while their particular part of the rig was being built, so they could give input, gain ground-level knowledge, and better prepare themselves for later operations.

The crew-up happened in four waves. First in were the top maintenance people—those in charge of keeping the various equipment systems running. They were there early while the guts of the ship were still exposed, so they know how every machine and controller is put together and where every wire goes, derrick to keel, bow to stern. Daniel McLaughlin is Chief Engineer on the *BlackLion*, and he was the first one in, arriving about a month before the keel was laid. Since then he has overseen every stage of construction and will do every inspection until the rig is commissioned. McLaughlin is in charge of every system on board from a mechanical and maintenance standpoint, but until the rig is delivered and leaves the Hyundai shipyard, his role is strictly observational. He's more than a little antsy to get his hands dirty.

“While HHI is building the ship we aren't allowed to touch anything. Right now we are just pestering them to do all of our work for us. Once we get control of the ship, it's going to get much more intense,” he says. “The biggest challenge is the newness of the vessel. There are only three other ships like this in the world. So we are absorbing the manuals, trying to prep our brains. We don't know what we don't know, so we have a lot to take in. Hopefully we can use all of our past experiences to help predict the future on what to expect.” McLaughlin adds that those three other ships have been valuable for setting expectations. “We liaison with the other ships quite often. We were in the shipyard at the same time for a while, so there has been a lot of information passed down. Plus we are getting most of our crewmembers from those ships.”

The second wave of crew sent to the *BlackLion* consisted of about half the key operational positions such as toolpushers, drillers and dynamic positioning operators. The third group rounded out the other half of these positions along with the ship's captains/offshore installation managers (OIMs). Fourth in line came the people who did not need specific drillship training, such as roustabouts and floor hands. Getting this last group lined up was particularly challenging because they could not come

until Diamond Offshore took delivery of the ship from HHI, and that date, as is typically the case, kept getting pushed back. But, says Karen Roll, you still have to have all your crewmembers ready for the earliest possible date.

“Diamond Offshore did something that I believe made the crewing process successful and more rewarding for the employees,” she says. “Because of all the specialized equipment, the crew had to go through three months of drillship-specific training. So there was a three-month period where they were released from their current rig and were able to dedicate themselves completely to training before reporting to the ship in South Korea. This had to be meticulously coordinated so each group was ready to report on time and the training facilities were ready for the next wave. I know, because I personally made a calendar for every employee to show them where to be, when to be there, and what they would be working on.”

SAFETY AT SEA

Michelle Gorman is Master OIM on the *BlackLion*. That means she's the ship's captain. Sitting on the expansive window-walled bridge that looks more spaceship than seagoing vessel, she gazes out at the busy shipyard and longs to leave it behind for the high seas. In the



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last few weeks before sailing she busies herself with the very non-captain task of prodding the shipbuilders to finish the job, so she can do hers.

“The biggest challenge we face before we can get out there drilling is dealing with the shipyard.” Gorman says. “We are in a different position than usual, where we are the client who has to wait. Right now we are trying to finalize the last few open items and come to an agreement what work is going to be completed here. We all are very ready to take control of this ship and start doing things the Diamond way.” Gorman says this impatience is more about eagerness than anything else. “Everyone is getting really excited to go to work and be successful. When you have that with a crew, everything is

easier because everyone is taking ownership and wanting to team up to make this a successful venture. I really like the crews who have come aboard so far.

There is really good morale on the boat. There’s a lot of enthusiasm here.”

In late May Gorman got her wish. The *BlackLion* was officially delivered and her crew finally took the control they had craved for so long. With HHI at last astern, the great challenge ahead for the crew was safety. Operating safely is paramount at Diamond Offshore, and the level of vigilance has to be even higher when fielding a brand-new crew on a brand-new rig. “I have to make sure the crews understand this is our number one priority,” says Gorman. “There is always a learning curve any time

you take a new rig, and people need to remember to take a step back and know what they are doing prior to going ahead.”

Lionel Gautreaux is Safety Department Representative on the *BlackLion*, and he has a plan. Before sailing he had to prepare 1,500 JSAs—job safety analysis documents that guide every task on the rig in detail. The JSAs were sent from a sister rig, and each one has to be modified to the *BlackLion*. Gautreaux says this is an unusually high number of JSAs to develop, by far. “In the first month we got 200 of the 1,500 done. But the bigger challenge will be the human factor behind these documents. We don’t want to just teach them the steps to follow. We have to make sure they really understand why

we are doing each procedure. We don't want to just force-feed all of these policies at one time. We want you to really absorb the safety culture and go home every day with ten fingers and ten toes and the breath you came to work with."

Gautreaux says HR's crewing strategy has made a huge difference in seating the safety culture. "A lot of our people have been with the company a long time, but we also have a lot of new hires. Many of them have never even been offshore. We have to make sure there is a bridge between the senior people and new hires to transfer their knowledge. The HR department did a great job of finding people with a great attitude for learning our systems. They ask a lot of questions and want to do things the Diamond Offshore way. Everyone has a go-get-'em attitude about learning safety. The camaraderie has been unbelievable."

Michelle Gorman adds that this tight circle of safety solidarity includes the client as well. "Hess has been onboard with us from the beginning. The company has a great reputation for safety, and I really see that with their reps onboard. They have been very active in our safety meetings, very vocal. They're watching, and so am I. We're all here to ensure good safe operations. That's priority one."

HIGH STAKES FOR HESS

When the *BlackLion* begins drilling in the Gulf of Mexico in late 2015, the ship will be making history for Hess. According to Ron Nelson, Completion Engineer for Hess, these will be the most challenging and probably the most expensive wells the company has ever drilled. Vertical well depth will exceed 30,000 feet into sub-salt formations that have wide pressure variations, tight production zones, and zero margin for error. "When the rig gets to the Gulf and goes to work,

it has to be right," says Nelson. "All of our plans are based around the rig systems and flawless execution from the crew. If everything is not right, we won't be drilling these wells until it is. So taking the time here at the front end is critical. We have clear expectations of what the performance will be before the rig goes on Hess payroll."

Nelson is part of the Hess team overseeing the *BlackLion's* final preparations in the shipyard, a team led by Completions Supervisor Jim Wenner. As soon as Hess secured the contract for the drillship, Wenner says the company started to weigh in on how to crew it. "These wells are critical to Hess, so we gave guidance on what experience levels we'd like to see in each position, as well as some additional staff we would want on the rig. Diamond Offshore submitted CVs of possible candidates for Hess to review, and in some cases we actually conducted interviews."

Wenner states that Hess already had high confidence in Diamond Offshore personnel based on recent experiences. In 2012-2013, the *Ocean Valiant* had been the flagship rig supporting the company's major drilling interests in Equatorial Guinea. "That rig performed very well for us, so we feel very good about continuing to work with Diamond Offshore," he says. "Hess has a great relationship with Diamond all the way up to the CEOs, and the attitude on this project has been great. When we see something of concern from a client perspective, we discuss it. We are always included in the decision process. This kind of teamwork is essential for what we are about to undertake together."

Like the rest of the crew, Wenner is ready to get to the Gulf of Mexico and get the drill bit turning. He's used to drilling and completing wells, so watching the shipyard knock out the last few punch-list items is about like

watching paint dry. "The departure day is a bit of a moving target, but we try to be lenient and flexible. We've never drawn a hard line in the sand. We've been given a range of time, and everything has fallen within that range. That said, I'm really looking forward to pulling out and seeing the full crew functioning and working together. It will be great to take the shipyard out of the equation and get out there where it's just Diamond and Hess taking control and getting things exactly how we want them."

ANCHORS WEIGH

As of this writing, the *Ocean BlackLion* is fully crewed and en route to the Gulf of Mexico. After a three-day crew change and refueling stop in Mauritius, she rounded Africa's Cape of Good Hope on June 29th under unseasonably calm conditions. Up the West African coast to Las Palmas in the Canary Islands for a month and a half of client-contracted upgrades, crew change and refueling, then the ship is off to the GOM.

In those last few exciting days before departing South Korea, Safety Rep Lionel Gautreaux summed up the crewing process, now complete. "From what I can see, the people here feel proud to have a job on this particular rig. They feel it was maybe a special calling to be assigned here. They are very optimistic, very outgoing and eager to work," he says. "Everyone is ready. The shipyard has been great. Ulsan has been a beautiful city to us and treated us well. I hope we have treated her well, too. We've enjoyed it, but we are ready to leave and do a good job for Hess."