

PennEnergy® Rebel Yell: Female-Led Oil Company Shuns Conformity

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Staci Taruscio, President and CEO, Rebellion Energy

In the wake of a depressing year in the [oil industry](#), most companies are just doing what they can to survive, some barely holding on for dear life. Then you have those who are just getting started - those who are taking the bull by the horns and staying on longer than the typical 8 seconds.

Meet Staci Taruscio. If there were ever a more tenacious spirit in the [oil and gas](#) world, you wouldn't know it. Taruscio's presence is energetic, but serene – she's sure of herself, but soft and gentle. And boy is she smart!

Taruscio, Rebellion Energy's petite but mighty President and CEO, brings more than a decade of petroleum engineering experience to her modest Tulsa office and western Oklahoma operations.

Taruscio got a scholarship to play soccer at the University of Tulsa. She knew early on that she wanted to be a leader, and to work in an industry that was dynamic and continually challenging. She thought that since TU had a world renowned petroleum engineering department, why not make that her focus. And focus she did, graduating from TU with a BA in Petroleum Engineering and later with an MBA from Oklahoma State.

Taruscio spent her early career at [Samson Resources](#) where she built a solid foundation of operations, production, reservoir and economic skill-sets in both Asset Engineering and A&D positions. "I was very, very lucky to be hired by Samson," Taruscio remembered, with a broad and fond smile across her face. "Samson was an incubator for business savvy, spirited, entrepreneurial type engineers, and I am proud to have been a part of that."

Her time at Samson coupled with an iteration with private equity backed Rockford Energy Partners and later [Mid-Con Energy Partners](#) prepared her for what she is doing now. "I knew very early on that I wanted to do something like this. I don't know why, necessarily, but maybe it was the whole idea of not working for the man. I probably thought along the way that I could do it better, or just as well. Maybe I'm wrong, we'll see. Surely just as well." she said with that lilt and smile that one discovers is quintessential Staci Taruscio even after only two minutes in her presence.

The Rebellion Team

Taruscio started [Tulsa-based Rebellion Energy](#), along with [Natural Gas Partners](#) (NGP), in mid-2015, gathering a team of dedicated and passionate professionals, all of which have the desire to think outside of the box in order to progress in an industry not known for contemporary thinking. This, at a critical moment in time that will separate those willing to lean in from those who sit back and wait. Taruscio says, "It is easy to stagnate in this environment but we cannot confuse stillness with patience; there is plenty to be done to prepare for the right time to strike."

This type of endeavor takes gumption, dedication and well, shall we say, high arches. But mostly it takes know-how and smarts – and Taruscio has a lot of that.

The team Taruscio has built shares an expertise in secondary recovery and an affinity for neglected assets, and they take great pride in their creative approach to the revival of oil producing properties. This creativity is rooted in a strong

geotechnical foundation.



The Rebellion team: Kaci Lenz, Jim Qualls, Danny Daniels, Staci Taruscio, Tom Walton, Ginny Albert, Stephanie Orr

“Jim Qualls, the Vice President of Geology, is so thorough in his understanding of each project that we can throw ideas at him from any angle and he is willing to improve upon his latest interpretation.” Maps are always “in progress” according to Taruscio. She goes on to say, “This works because we took ego out of the equation very early on; no idea isn’t worth thinking about.

“It all ties back to the rebellion name. We cannot continue to do things because that is how they have always been done, even in a technology as old as waterflooding ... especially in a technology as old as waterflooding! And particularly in Oklahoma where there are very mature oil fields, the obvious stuff has already been done.

“A Rebellion doesn’t have to be an abrasive concept. In our case it is an opportunity for improvement,” she continued.

From a company and personnel perspective, Rebellion is looking for ways to tap those resources in a new way. They are thinking about the entirety of the business in a way that breaks from the status quo.

Taruscio is vibrant, tenacious and sharp. And she wants her team to complement those things. And they do – happily.

Her team of professionals enjoy going to the office every day. Rebellion Energy isn't your typical 9 to 5 dungeon. It's a bright, open area where lively banter flits in and out of the surrounding individual offices. There are maps on the walls, an open work area, and a behemoth and colorful striped marlin mounted on the wall that VP of Operations Tom Walton claims he caught himself. It's a place that is full of energy and exuberance. And it is clear from the smile on VP of Business Development Danny Daniels' face that Rebellion Energy is the place to be.

"The thing that separates Staci from other oil and gas CEOs is that she is a great team leader. A lot of engineers are not managers. Staci is. She's great at building a team and a culture that work. That is one thing she has that is going to make us different, set us apart," remarked Stephanie Orr, VP of Technical Services.

Girl Power

With a strong team of three women and three men at her side, one might wonder if Taruscio is working to maintain that perfect balance of the sexes.

"Oftentimes women aren't being taken advantage of as employees because the perception is that their job takes a backseat to their family or personal life." Taruscio remarked. "To be perfectly frank, women often have superior organizational skills to men. Women are known to be excellent communicators. Most women are efficient multitaskers. All of these skills translate to successful teams.

"Everyone knows about work life balance but people seem to be more critical of it with women. Kaci, our head of accounting and finance, is a great example, she has four very active kids that she successfully orchestrates every day and that sometimes means she needs to work flexible hours. The value that Kaci adds in any given hour at work is oftentimes more than the average employee; this might even be because of those project management skills she has developed from family," Taruscio continued, "her life is one big Gantt chart.

"I am not suggesting that women are more valuable than men but I do think that more effort should be made to take advantage of inherent differences. Our team is very efficient and creative because we all have complementary skill sets; we are good at solving problems because we have the energy of youth tempered by the wisdom of experience,

the perspective of finance and accounting alongside geology and engineering, and the brawn of men versus the finesse of women. This versus the sameness of the good 'ol boys clubs."

There is a lot to be said for getting women involved in [STEM education and careers](#). Men largely outnumber women in science, technology, engineering and math. Girls lose interest in these subjects as early as age eight. Taruscio believes it is important to get involved in programs that keep young women interested and, more importantly to exemplify some of the possibilities for young women. Ultimately, these girls will grow up and know that they can be successful in the energy sector.

"Young women don't know that there is opportunity for them in the oil industry until they see a really good woman Landman, like our VP of Land, Ginny Albert. She kicks ass every day. They see that she can be smart and driven and tough AND beautiful and fun and a mother." Taruscio said.

"I think you have to make sure that you are hiring quality women and then put their image out there in a prideful way. As opposed to hiring a woman for the wrong reasons or hiring her and not providing the tools or environment for her to succeed. A single fail can cancel out multiple wins."

Family is Where the Heart is

Taruscio's office is friendly, and the first things you notice are a pack n play, pictures of her family, and kid's art on the walls. Then you see the plans, lots of plans lying about. Maps of the wells Rebellion has recently acquired or has plans to acquire. This place has energy, lots of energy.

But back to that pack n play.

"Family is important because it brings joy to people's lives. It's not just family it's hobbies or anything outside of work. If your brain is constantly focused on work concepts then it will have the tendency to get in a rut. If you go out and do something different like painting or playing with your kids, it is exercise for your brain, cross-training." Taruscio explained.



Taruscio's signature laugh can brighten an entire room.

"It's like driving to work a new way each day for a whole week, it keeps you on your toes. So a big portion of the way people do family is solving problems. How can I get Stella to pick up her room while keeping Carmen from crying ... the answer yesterday was a version of musical chairs to *My Little Pony Rainbow Rocks*. It takes creativity, A LOT of patience, and a willingness to try new and oftentimes silly stuff. It also comes back to the multitasking thing. So, having a family is a good thing. Not just for personal reasons, but it adds another dimension to the way you go about life."

There are often kids running around the Rebellion HQ. "Sometimes it's obnoxious. But also sometimes it's just really fun," Taruscio said with a trademark laugh bold enough to brighten any room. "Having the kids around takes away the

need to be so serious and grouchy. Tom doesn't have young kids, and when my kids come up to the office, they make him laugh. That's a good thing. Family is tricky because there are burdens associated with it, it is hard – but I think you're doing it wrong if the burdens outweigh the benefits.”

Opening Up the Flood Gates

Rebellion is all about the team, family, smarts, passion, dedication and innovation. But what is it really all about?

Rebellion has ops in Western Oklahoma, primarily. They are currently in acquisition mode, probably alongside every other new startup. They are interested in the acquisition of properties in Central and Western Oklahoma, the Texas panhandle, and up into SW Kansas

Essentially, Rebellion buys and recovers neglected, yet proven assets. They don't plan on drilling much. Their focus is to find old oil fields that have been a low priority for a lot of years and buy them low. They will then take a fresh look and determine ways to optimize by increasing production or decreasing expenses.

One of those ways could be waterflooding.

“We are spending a lot of our time focusing on how we can buy quality assets because there are a lot of deals on the market right now, it's like shopping at a department store,” Taruscio said.

Taruscio and her team aren't making money right now. But that's OK, that's their model. They will manage a marginal asset until a waterflood response is seen and they begin to make returns.

“We believe there is still a lot of oil in the ground, left behind because companies hastily moved on to the next big play,” said Orr. “These properties aren't flashy and take a lot of detail oriented work, but they can have a big response and then provide a long steady flow of income.”

Rebellion's goal is to piece enough of those neglected properties together, optimizing them along the way, and when the market rebounds, have a strong production base for a larger company to buy as a steady and proven asset for their books.

Water Flooding 101

Water flooding isn't new technology; it's been around for years. It takes a lot of up front capital, and it can take years to see the results. People often give up prematurely and assume the flood was unsuccessful.

Waterflooding takes a group of wells, and, using some to inject water and others to produce fluids, fashions a pattern wherein the injected water can most effectively displace oil to the producers. The response is not immediate because the water must first fill up the void that was previously created during the primary stages of production. As that void is filled, the pressure in the reservoir increases and oil is swept toward the pressure sink created from producing oil wells.

“All of a sudden BOOM production begins to incline and you are producing oil you may otherwise never have seen,” said Orr.

Waterflooding takes conventional oil production and does something a little unconventional with it. It takes it to another level. “And that is just one method of secondary recovery, there are others as well as a tertiary option to explore down the road,” Taruscio explained.

Rebel Without a Pause

Along the way, Taruscio has come across some interesting people. She says that is primarily what keeps her interested – the people. She also enjoys the technical side of things – calls it her “wheelhouse.”

She feels very fortunate to be in the situation she is in, and is incredibly appreciative of the opportunities she has been given.

“I am thankful for so many people. Not just mentors, but people who don’t remember my name or even those who were jerks along the way,” Taruscio said.

“They have all helped in some way, even if it is learning what not to do. Tulsa has been very good to me. It is a great place to live and work and be in this business, there are a lot of people in town that are better than I am at specific things and Tulsa provides the forum for someone like me to bring it all together in a way that I hope ultimately helps the community.”

Taruscio goes back and forth between loving the small team she has right now and thinking that getting bigger would be a lot of fun.

“Maybe it comes from a competitive nature, I want to be the best, but I don’t know if I really want everything associated with that growth or if just like the idea of winning,” Taruscio said.

"I fluctuate back and forth between those things, especially when I see someone I know do something great, like Bluestone buying Quicksilver ... I am proud of them because that is a great thing but it also makes me want to go do a great thing.

"When I really think about it, though, the things that make this really fun are the people and the ideas. Whatever that balance is of big and small where we can still maintain those two things are the most important to me. And I hope everyone makes a lot of money on the way, but that's not what's most important and not really why we are here. But it helps."



Rebellion Energy isn't your typical 9 to 5 dungeon. This team knows how to have fun AND get down to business.

"It does help. For me it might be 50/50. I am here primarily because this is an amazing place to work. Opportunities like this aren't an everyday thing," remarked Orr. "This is a place where I can have a little doggie bed in my office for days she really wants to come to work with me."

Then Taruscio asked, "If we took away the incentive units, which is how everyone makes the money, would you stay?"

Before she could finish her sentence, Orr responded, "Absolutely, I would still be here. And I change it to 70/30, not 50/50. Besides, people who love their jobs do well."

"Me, too," Taruscio added, "I would still be here, too."

The Rebellion family is ready to shake things up. They are on a mission to be great. There is no stopping their dedication, passion and skill.

After last year, with 2016's dismal start, and a grim outlook through 2017, everyone in the oil industry is gritting their teeth and holding on tight.

Rebellion Energy is holding on tight along with the rest of them. "Patience is a virtue right now. But there will be great opportunity for those willing to make a big move," Taruscio said.