



**Immense
Growth Through
Industry Savvy &
Quality Service**
Est. 2008

Some of the oilfield guys who became acquainted with David Thill referred to him as that “crazy banker.” But they may have changed their tune in recent years - now that Thill’s company handles about 40 percent of the vertical oilfield casing business in Kansas.

Thill is co-owner of D & S Casing Crews LLC with his wife, Shellie; their initials created the company name. “I was president of Sunflower Bank in Great Bend and Ellinwood,” Thill said. “I was there for eight years and decided I wanted to do something different.”

“I knew the oilfield casing business because I put myself through college working for Francis Casing Crews, which was a long-time family business here,” he noted. “This was a major change. I was in a suit-and-tie profession and went to the oilfield. I left job security and benefits, along with an inside desk environment, which is why I became known as the ‘crazy banker.’”

D & S Casing Crews, 4713 8th, opened in March 2008. Thill and two investors started in 25-by-50-foot mechanic-shop spaces just to the east of this current location. “We started with one space, big enough for one truck, then two, then three,” Thill recalled. “In January of 2013, we moved into this 7300 square foot building, which we designed specifically for a casing business.”

“For one type of job you need specific equipment and for another job, different equipment,” he explained. “So we put in a bridge crane to go from one set of tools to the next. Before this, trucks had to be moved in and out of the building. This crane makes us more efficient and safer.”

When D & S opened early in 2008, there were 95 drilling rigs operating in western Kansas; by the end of that year, there were only 27 still operating. “That’s when we questioned what we had done,” Thill laughed. “But we used that time as an opportunity. Then the price of oil started going back up.”

Before Thill started the business, he analyzed the competition and decided he would have to take service to the next level. “I knew we would have to be better than our competition,” he explained. “So we decided to focus on three priorities – being clean cut, well-trained and drug tested.”



David & Shellie Thill, owners of D&S Casing Crews, pose for a photo next to David’s vehicle. The name of the business comes from their first initials.

D & S Casing started with four employees and now has 28, including a safety manager. “This is an unbelievable group of people, that I’m proud of” Thill said. “This is one of the most physically demanding jobs in the oilfield and we are on 24-hour call. Maybe other jobs are as physically demanding but they don’t go day and night. Our guys need agility and strength; they are like the athletes of the oilfield.”

“I have a high level of respect for our employees,” he added. “They stick with us and we take care of them. Our focus is to improve on a superior level of service. It is our competitive edge.”

Since the entire state of Kansas is D & S’s territory, the crews work with different people and companies on a regular basis. “Our guys adapt to this,” Thill commented. “We even help the drilling companies with the changeover to get ready to run the casing. They appreciate this so much; it cuts time and, therefore, cuts costs. Another plus, it creates a great working relationship with our customers.”

“This is our philosophy on how to grow the business – bring service to a higher level,” he added. In the early days, Thill went to rig locations with his employees and performed all the casing tasks. “That’s how we grew our market; I can’t do that as often now.”

D & S receives calls from rotary rigs that need a casing crew on site in 8-12 hours. “You either commit or you don’t,” Thill said. “You have to have a crew on stand-by, ready to go. We are dedicated to hiring responsible people but if someone is unavailable, I will get out of bed and go.”

The business started with one crew and recently added a sixth. These crews help install the production casing, which is a large-diameter pipe that is assembled and inserted into a recently drilled section of a borehole. It is typically held in place by cement. “One thing people don’t understand is that if a rig drills a dry hole, we don’t work,” Thill noted. “But 3D seismic technology has increased the percentage of producing wells. Instead of one out of three, it is now closer to two out of three that we can run casing on.”

“We chose to stay out of the horizontal-drilling market,” he added. “It is a different market and the equipment is different. The horizontal jobs can take 20 to 36 hours; our jobs take six to twelve. We chose to stick with what we know and are good at.”

Thill is a 1981 graduate of Great Bend High School; he earned a degree in business and minor in finance at Fort Hays State University in 1986. He has been in management and sales positions throughout his career. So, Great Bend is home, but it is also “a good, central location for us to operate our business from,” Thill commented. “Great Bend is the oil-service hub of Kansas.” —

