



Utah Petroleum Association Honors the Life of Bill Barrett

Obituary: Born in Topeka, Kansas in 1929, as the Dust Bowl and Great Depression began to take hold, William J. Barrett became a legendary oil and gas entrepreneur and a prodigious family man. He died September 16, 2025, at his home in Denver, Colorado. He was 96.

Bill grew up in a three-bedroom house along with nine other children as his father worked two jobs to support them. From an early age, Bill was always a hard worker, starting with the family's poultry business.

While in college his father suffered a stroke, and Bill returned home to help run the family business. Bill met the love of his life, Louise Kuhn, while delivering chickens to her home. They soon married in 1950 and were together for seventy years.

Bill served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. He then earned a Master's degree in Geology from Kansas State University in 1958, with the help of the GI Bill.

His first energy job was with El Paso Natural Gas Company, in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Farmington, New Mexico, where he was a stratigrapher. The job required him to learn and understand, in great detail, the geology of the Rocky Mountain oil and gas basins. This experience formed the bedrock of his ability to find and develop record quantities of oil and natural gas as a wildcatter.

Bill then worked with Amoco Corporation in Casper, Wyoming and Denver, Colorado before becoming Chief Geologist for Wolf Exploration in Denver in 1967. At Wolf, he made two major discoveries: the 20 million-plus barrel Hilight oil field and the giant Madden natural gas field.

In 1969, Bill partnered with Chuck Shear to form B & C Exploration which was subsequently acquired by the Williams Companies in 1978. With proceeds from the sale, Bill launched Barrett Resources Corp in 1981, which went public on the New York Stock Exchange in 1983. Under Bill's leadership, the company made major discoveries in North Dakota, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado. The company's growth was recognized by Oil and Gas Investor magazine as the highest rate of return oil and gas company from 1990 to 2000. The company was acquired by the Williams Companies in 2001.



At 73 years of age, Bill was lured out of retirement by his two youngest sons to form Bill Barrett Corporation in early 2002. After a successful IPO in 2004, Bill continued to lead the company until he retired for the third time at age 77.

In leading his companies, Bill maintained a culture of recognizing the contributions of all members of the team and generously shared the company's successes. Family members were instrumental along the way, including his four sons, a brother-in-law, and one of his daughters.

Bill was named Outstanding Explorer of the Year by the Rocky Mountain Association of Geologists, Wildcatter of the Year by IPAMS (now the Western Energy Alliance), and the American Association of Petroleum Geologists' (AAPG) Explorer of the Year. Bill is in the Western Energy Alliance Hall of Fame and the Southeast Utah Energy Producers Association Hall of Fame. He received an honorary Doctor of Engineering degree from the Colorado School of Mines. He was recognized as a Pioneer of the Piceance, a massive natural gas field Barrett Resources developed over two decades in northwestern Colorado.

Bill was first and foremost a devoted husband to Louise, and loving father to his seven children, 16 Grandchildren, and 13 great grandchildren, all of whom he adored and spoiled. He always thought highly of learning and education and generously supported his children and grandchildren in their education pursuits. His love and generosity were further reflected in his great joy in taking family members on many trips throughout the world to share unforgettable experiences and memories, the largest of which was a trip to China in 2008, with a total entourage of 27 family members. Another of Bill's passions was getting together with the extended Barrett and Kuhn families. He enthusiastically supported family reunions on both sides of the family in places like Hilton Head, South Carolina, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and in Colorado and Kansas. Bill also found joy in the company of animals, holding special fondness for the unconditional love and companionship they offered. They inevitably came to know him as someone with a kind hand.

He celebrated his 90th birthday by writing his memoir: "Bill Barrett: Rocky Mountain Wildcatter" detailing his family history, career and biography. Bill and Louise were supporters of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, Children's Hospital, the Denver Art Museum, Denver Botanic Gardens, and the American Diabetes Association, just to name a few.



Professional organizations receiving his strong support included Kansas State University, Colorado School of Mines, the American Association of Petroleum Geologists Foundation, and the American Geological Institute. Bill was preceded in death by his wife Louise and a granddaughter.

The immediate family will hold a private memorial service at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Wheatridge, Colorado followed by a private celebration of life in Denver, Colorado.