

Supervisory retirees Return trip shows them the changes

BY SHERRY KAHAN

"I think you'll be surprised by what you see," announced the manager of Chevrolet Spring and Bumper in Livonia as he recently welcomed 23 retirees who had been supervisory employees to the plant for lunch and a tour.

His reference was not to baseball, but to the fact that the plant had more than doubled its size since it started in 1964. Salaried and hourly workers also had more than doubled and new methods of production had been devised for turning out all those springs and bumpers.

Among area residents invited back to be honored by their company were Ray Arnold, Carmen Carpenter, Steve Kiepack and Ray McGrath of Plymouth and Ed

ward Kuczynski, Albert Laramee and Joseph Kosman of Livonia.
Also on hand to greet their old chums were Joseph Creech of Bedford Township, Holte Creech of Westland, and the one woman in the group, Eleanor Griener for mercy of Farmington, who now lives in South Lyon.

HOLLY E. CREECH of Westland thought the luncheon and plant tour was "absolutely wonderful," adding, "I've laid out the red carpet for us."
A production foreman who retired in 1972, he noticed changes in the heat treat department where automation reduced the number of men involved in the production of stabilizers, rods that are used to stabilize the front end of the automobile.

"Making his way through the plant where he spent 13 years of his life, he met a few old friends and stopped to chat a while that he has no longing to be back. "I don't think I'd like it a day," he said.
Instead, he spends his time as the first man around his house and writing poetry. "I've written about 100 poems on all kinds of subjects," he said.

Steve Kiepack of Plymouth retired in 1972, so the contrast between that time and the present was not nearly as great as the contrast between the '70s and 1950 when he had joined the company as a tool and die maker.
He was 18 at the time and Chevrolet had just moved from a four- to a six-cylinder car.

"We worked seven days a week, 12 hours a day," Kiepack recalled. "We worked Christmas Eve and everything. When the National Recovery Act was passed, we went to three shifts and only had to work eight hours a day."
MOVING INTO A routine, he found he could get used to the pace.

"But when I came home I usually went to sleep and went back to work the next morning," he remembered.

But who complained? "When I came to work, I used to pass a line of men three abreast, about two blocks long, waiting to apply for a job," he said. "So I felt I was lucky. There were seven of us at home and nobody else was working."
"On my first job I made 40 cents an hour. Production people were getting 45 cents an hour if you got a two cents an hour raise, you were doing good. If you got three cents you were doing exceptionally good."

"There was no such thing as paid vacations and coffee breaks. I walked into the place in November 1927 and the place was cold and full of smoke. They used oil in the furnaces then, but later switched to gas."

Times were bad. Before beginning his career, Kiepack had banked \$75 earned by delivering papers to 210 customers every day. The bank closed and he lost it all.

Yet, he now can say that he feels sorry for the young people of today. "Everything costs so much," he noted.
Like the other retirees, Edward Kuczynski of Livonia enjoyed looking up old friends during the visit to the factory.

His field was plant security, but he noted that when he came to work in 1954, he was called a watchman.

"OUR PRIMARY function was to protect the plant from fire," he remembered. "Our second job was to prevent petty theft. In those days, we didn't have any equipment. We mainly walked around."
"Now it's more complicated. We have radio communication with the office. We carry walkie talkies and have training sessions once a month to learn to use the equipment."

Another Livonian, Al Laramee, retired more than three years ago from a job as production superintendent. He also referred to the "red carpet" treatment received by the returning retirees.
Walking around the plant, he noticed more women working than had been there before. He observed less smoke in the air and a new kind of heat treatment.

"They don't use oil to harden the springs," he said. "They use a different

substance, to keep smoke from the air and to give a more uniform heat treatment."
"Before they had to depend on humans. Now it's all automatic."

Is there a greater emphasis on safety today?
"It's the same emphasis we always had," Laramee declared. "We have always been number one as far as safety is concerned."

His opinion was enlarged upon by Chuck McNamara, internal communications coordinator at the factory.
"Safety is a priority at the plant now," he said, adding that gas furnaces have been replaced by electricity, resulting in a reduction of smoke. He also pointed out the use of a water-based quenching solution, which produces a less smoky atmosphere.

ELEANOR GRIENER LIVED in Farmington when she worked for Chevrolet in Livonia. She started work in 1930 as a stenographer six days a week for Chevrolet Gear and Axle, and was transferred when the Livonia plant opened to take charge of the typing section.



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