

Mike Petters

Master Shipbuilders Dinner

May 4, 2007

Remarks

Thank you, Bill.

And thank you to EVERYONE in this room tonight.

**To the Master Shipbuilders -- for your 40 or more years of service
– an accomplishment which distinguishes you in any industry,
especially shipbuilding.**

**And to the spouses and loved ones who are with you -- for the
sacrifices you have made and for the support you have provided
over all of these years.**

This is a significant accomplishment for you too.

It is truly a pleasure for me to be here tonight.

As Bill mentioned, this dinner and The Apprentice School graduation are my two favorite events.

Both are celebrations of our company's greatest resource – our people.

This event -- clearly -- is also a celebration of experience.

Lots of it.

There are 492 of you with a combined total of nearly 21,000 years of service.

That is truly unbelievable.

I like to start by asking the new Master Shipbuilders – those of you from the Class of 1966 – to please stand.

There are 189 of you this year. Congratulations.

Now can we have ALL of the Master Shipbuilders stand?

Finally, I'd like to ask the spouses of the Master Shipbuilders to please stand.

Thank you all.

As Bill mentioned earlier, our highest-ranking Master Shipbuilder, Curtis Irby, has some company this year in the half-century club.

We have FIVE employees celebrating 50 years of service.

Two of them are with us tonight and I want to tell you a little about each of them.

Vincent Sinclair grew up in Hampton and got married at a young age.

He says any boy could get married, but it took a man to provide for his wife.

So he quit his part-time job and started working in the shipyard on December 13, 1956.

He started in O43 Facilities Maintenance but ended up welding for more than 20 years.

Later, as an instructor at the Welding School, he says he taught Danny Hunley the finer points of the trade.

He now works in Welding Services.

Vincent's 50 years in the shipyard have treated him well.

He has three daughters and three grandchildren, one of whom will graduate from Old Dominion University tomorrow with a degree in business.

Vincent, would you please stand?

Thank you – and congratulations.

Henry Deese Jr. was born in Thomasville, North Carolina, but moved to Newport News on July 4, 1941, when his father got a job at the shipyard that paid 88 cents an hour – double his pay in the furniture business.

Henry followed in his father's footsteps and started working in the shipyard in 1956 -- first in the Sheet Metal Shop and then as a junior designer in the Atomic Power Division.

His two brothers – Harold and Douglas -- also worked here, reaching 44 years and 39 years, respectively.

Henry now works in the material section of E45 Engineering Material and Production Support.

He celebrated his 51st anniversary last Tuesday.

He says he has always enjoyed working in the shipyard and he has no plans to leave.

That's good news Henry.

He is here tonight with his wife, Bobbie.

Henry, would you please stand?

Thank you – and congratulations.

Unfortunately, our other 50-year shipbuilders -- Thomas Critzer Jr., Burwell Cullipher and Donald Steppe -- couldn't be here tonight, but I want to also congratulate them on 50 years of service. What a remarkable achievement!

Tonight is also a time to recognize our newest Master Shipbuilders – the Class of 1966.

What was going on in 1966? Well, here is a video to help us set the scene.

[Roll Video.]

I would like to highlight a few things that weren't included in the video.

The Soviet Union actually beat us to the moon, achieving a soft landing with the unmanned Luna 9 space capsule in February 1966.

We've all heard the words: "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law?"

I hope you aren't too familiar with them!

Those words, known as Miranda Rights, originated from a landmark Supreme Court ruling – in 1966.

Do we have any Trekkies here tonight?

We boldly went where no man had gone before when Star Trek debuted on NBC in 1966.

So what was going on in the shipyard?

Well, five of our aircraft carriers were serving in Vietnam – Ticonderoga, Enterprise, Ranger, America and Forrestal.

As we saw in the video, John F. Kennedy (CV 67) was under construction in Dry Dock 11, and we hit launch or delivery milestones for five submarines: Queenfish, Ray, Lapon, George C. Marshall and George Washington Carver.

Those submarines have long since been scrapped, and with the recent decommissioning in March, you can all say you outlasted CV 67, USS John F. Kennedy.

The greatest thing that happened in the shipyard in 1966, though, was that 189 of you started working here.

And you stayed. For four decades.

We saw several of you in the video, but I want to recognize just a few more.

Alton Jones grew up in Newport News and graduated from Huntington High School.

His first day at the shipyard was May 4, 1966 – 41 years ago today.

Alton worked for two years in X13, the Erectors Department, and has spent the rest of his career as an X31 electrician.

He worked on the John F. Kennedy and has pulled cable on every carrier since.

Alton plans to work until 2008 – when we deliver the George H.W. Bush – and then move to South Carolina to run a small business with his wife, Ruby.

Importantly, he also has plans to finish restoring his 1976 Chevy Monte Carlo.

I should point out that Alton isn't the only one in his family with a long connection to the shipyard.

His father worked in Transportation, and he has two brothers who worked here – one in X33 for more than 30 years, one in X32 for 43 years.

Alton's son also worked in the shipyard.

He went to The Apprentice School and worked in the same department as his father before eventually moving to Florida.

Alton, would you please stand?

Happy anniversary – and thank you for your service!

Lillian Johnson grew up in Newport News and was one of Alton's classmates at Huntington High School.

She graduated and got a job at Sears, but when her sister told her the shipyard was hiring in the Reproduction Department, she applied.

“The shipyard was the number one place for working,” she says.

“It was a privilege to get a job there.”

Lillian, we like to think that's still the case!

Lillian worked on the blue-line machine and made blueprints that were 42 inches wide and up to 25 feet long.

Times have changed, but one thing hasn't: She says she has always loved the customer service aspect of her job.

Lillian, would you please stand?

Thank you, Lillian. We're happy you could be with us tonight.

Robert Amos grew up in Danville and started working at the shipyard on June 16, 1966. It was -- in his words -- “a whirlwind couple of weeks.”

He took exams on June 3, got married on June 5, graduated from Virginia Tech on June 12 and started working on June 16.

Bob had job offers from other companies all over the U.S., but he says he came to Newport News because it was the only one that offered him a personal interview.

Bob’s whirlwind lifestyle never let up.

Within six months of being hired, he was participating in sea trials for John F. Kennedy, and not long after that, he was on the team that did the original design for the 688-class submarines.

His expertise on submarine availabilities has taken him all over the world.

Bob tells a great story about traveling to Guam after USS San Francisco ran aground a few years ago.

While everyone was marveling over the Newport News design and construction that kept the ship afloat, Bob said, “Yeah, when this was designed, we were using pencils and slide rules.”

Another reminder of how times have changed.

Bob, would you please stand?

Thank you, Bob. Long live the Hokie spirit!

Clarence Moore started working in the shipyard on Sept. 15, 1966.

He was 18 years old and already had a job cooking at the Cape, Beach and Cabana Club in Virginia Beach, but his friend was applying for a job here, and Clarence, who had a car, offered him a ride.

Waiting in the employment office, someone asked him if he wanted to fill out an application.

That was Monday.

By Friday, he had quit his other job and was taking classes in the Welding School.

Clarence had four years of welding experience from high school in Suffolk, but he still admits he was “scared to death.”

One thing Clarence always liked about the shipyard was the sense of family.

When he was young, a welding school instructor named Mr. Franklin took him under his wing and gave him advice -- on the job and off.

For example, Mr. Franklin encouraged Clarence to join the credit union and save a portion of each paycheck.

When he got married a few years into his career, he already had a nest egg built up.

Clarence left the shipyard for three years, serving in the U.S. Army in Vietnam and Germany, but he has been here ever since, advancing his welding skills -- even to this day.

Clarence is now part of the nuclear welding team for the USS Carl Vinson overhaul.

Clarence says, “I came here very young and inexperienced. Now, I feel I’m a very mature, grown person that can offer guidance to the younger people.”

Isn’t that what being a Master Shipbuilder is all about?

Clarence, would you please stand?

Thank you, Clarence – and congratulations on this achievement.

I know each and every one of you in this room has stories like Alton, Lillian, Bob and Clarence – and the folks we saw in the video.

I'm sure many of you started working at the shipyard for the same reasons, and I suspect many of you stayed for the same reasons.

The challenge of the job.

The pride in building the world's best ships.

The lifelong friendships.

The sense of family.

But while all of you may have similar stories, you are all very unique.

And this accomplishment distinguishes you even more.

You are Master Shipbuilders.

With that title comes respect. And responsibility.

We can't put a price on the knowledge you have gained over the last four decades.

But we know it's worth even more if you leave some of it behind.

And pass it on.

No matter how much longer you stay at the shipyard – and I hope you all stay for a long time – I would ask that you commit to sharing your knowledge every day with those around you.

From new hires to employees with 10, 20 or 30 years of service – even your fellow Master Shipbuilders – we all benefit from your experience.

Congratulations, Master Shipbuilders – and thank you again for your commitment to Newport News.

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