

Mike Petters

Master Shipbuilders Dinner

April 17, 2008

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 skill, dedication, perseverance, and experience.

Lots of it.

There are 568 of you with a combined total of nearly 24,000 years of service.

That is truly unbelievable.

I like to start by asking the 163 new Master Shipbuilders – those of you from the Class of 1967 – to please stand.

Congratulations.

Now can we have ALL of the Master Shipbuilders stand?

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

Thank you all.

As Bill mentioned earlier, our highest-ranking Master Shipbuilder, Curtis Irby -- who is celebrating his 55<sup>th</sup> year, has even more company this year in the half-century club.

We have eight employees celebrating 50 or more years of service.

Soon we'll be having a separate party for the half-century master shipbuilders!

I've spoken often about Curtis Irby and his dedication – 55 years and still going strong.

Curtis is here with his wife Loretta. Thanks Curtis for yet another year of service!

Last year, I told a few stories about Vincent Sinclair, here with his girlfriend Linda -- and Henry Deese – here with his wife Roberta – both of them celebrating their 51<sup>st</sup> year.

Join me in giving them a round of applause.

Tonight I'd like to tell you a little about three other fifty year Master Shipbuilders.

First is Don Steppe – also celebrating his 51<sup>st</sup> year.

Don's first day was on April 15, 1956 when he started as an apprentice in the Machine Shop.

Today Don is in Cost Engineering.

Originally from Marion, North Carolina, he said he came to Newport News because there was "nothing to do in the mountains but make moonshine."

Once Don got started, there was no stopping him.

He went on to earn a bachelor's degree at N.C. State, followed by an MBA from the night school at William and Mary.

In the late 1980's Don taught a 40-hour management course.

I took that course from Don and he told someone he remembers me coming through his class.

In fact he said and I quote, "You can see what I did for him."

As far as retiring, Don has no immediate plans.

He put it like this: "As long as I've got a challenging job and I'm contributing something, I'm going to hang in there."

He's also been known to say, "I came in with the Enterprise, I might as well go out with it."

Don is here with his wife Martha. Join me in giving Don a round of applause.

A new addition to the 50-year club is Lloyd Joyner.

Lloyd came through the shipyard gates for the first time on March 18, 1957, to work in the Mold Loft.

Today he's a planner in X54 working on Carl Vinson and Theodore Roosevelt overhauls

He grew up in Smithfield and had a scholarship to play football at Emory and Henry – but he stayed in town for his girlfriend Betty.

That was a smart decision – not only for us at the shipyard – but because Betty soon became his wife.

Lloyd has lots of memories and one of them includes the shipyard in Pascagoula.

In the mid-1970s, we had a big repair job that Pascagoula had the body lines for.

Newport News sent Lloyd to get the information needed to replace the damaged hull structure.

But when he got to the shipyard in Mississippi, there had been some miscommunication.

They had the ship's body lines ready for him.

But they were all on a steel plate -- and only drawn to one tenth of the scale he needed them to be.

In true shipbuilding “get it done” approach, Lloyd, on his hands and knees on top of a table -- traced in ink on Mylar all the frame lines, decks, longitudinals, stringers and sight edges for the shell strakes.

It took him two days, but in true Southern hospitality fashion, the folks at Pascagoula took him to New Orleans' famous Bourbon Street as a reward!

Join me in giving Lloyd a hand – he is here tonight with Betty.

Anthony Bland, also celebrating his fiftieth year, began work as a shipfitter's helper on Oct. 8, 1957.

He went to Night School so he could move on to a job in the Drawing Room.

Today he works at AMSEC on 688-class submarines and stowage spaces on Virginia class

He was born in Goldsboro, N.C., but grew up in Newport News and went to Warwick High School with former Apprentice School football coach Norm Snead.

Anthony has worked on every type of boat in the shipyard and on all of the Los Angeles-class 688-class submarines

He's also a collector.

Just ask his wife Susan.

One day, Susan told him she "wanted her cabinets back."

He went into the kitchen to see what she was talking about and realized he had amassed a collection of more than 70 ships' coffee mugs.

He took them all out and donated them, along with other ship paraphernalia, to the Mariners' Museum.

Coffee mugs are a reoccurring theme in Anthony's life.

When his wife broke the stem on his beloved USS Los Angeles coffee mug, he gave a \$15 check to the chief of the boat to replace it.

A few weeks later, the captain summoned him to the wardroom, returned his check and presented him with two coffee mugs: one for him and one for his wife.

The CO told him he “didn’t want the Los Angeles to be grounds for divorce.”

Anthony says he has really enjoyed his half-century of service.

He said, “I’ve only worked with two people I’d like to tie to a lead anchor and throw off a rowboat. Those two persons are no longer around.”

He is here tonight with Susan – please join me in giving Anthony a hand.

Thanks to all of our 50 plus year Master Shipbuilders and congratulations!

Tonight is also a time to recognize our newest Master Shipbuilders – the Class of 1967.

You will see all their names scroll by at the end of the video you’re about to see.

And a few of them have a starring role.

Let’s roll the video, please.

1967 was a very busy year.

In February, the famous Admiral Hyman Rickover participated in the sea trials for the nuclear submarine Ray.

We launched two more submarines that year: Hammerhead and Sea Devil.

As you saw in the video, we christened the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy.

In August, we announced the construction of a \$3 million engineering office – now known as Building 600.

Most significantly, we were awarded a contract – for \$40 million – for the advanced planning, design and material procurement of CVN 68, the first ship in the Nimitz class.

Isn't it fitting that we will deliver the George H.W. Bush in November – giving you all the distinction of having careers that span the life of the Nimitz class?

That is impressive.

You are impressive.

In more recent shipyard news, last weekend, we authenticated the keel for the sixth Virginia-class submarine, New Mexico.

This ceremony is a traditional one – and the keel for a ship – as you well know – serves as its foundation.

It keeps it steady in the water – in both smooth and rough seas.

That's how I think of you – the Master Shipbuilders.

You are the keel for Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding at Newport News.

Your knowledge, your experience, your commitment, your skill – have gotten us through the best and worst of times in the past 40 years.

You've kept us steady in seas that were sometimes quite stormy.

I am very grateful to you -- and thankful for you.

And I have a favor to ask of each of you.

As the foundation, as the keel of Newport News, you need to help ensure that steadiness remains when you retire.

There is more shipbuilding knowledge in this room than anywhere in the world.

I need for you to share that knowledge.

I need for you to work with the generation coming up behind you – and the one behind them – in sharing the secrets of shipbuilding.

As you know, shipbuilding is science but it's really more of an art.

It's a craft that requires a unique person to master.

You have mastered this craft more than anyone.

You know best how to make the weld a seamless one.

You know best how to bend the pipe so it won't require rework.

You know best how to work safely in dangerous situations.

I am depending on you on you to share that hard earned knowledge with the young men and women you work with.

Because I believe that responsibility comes with your title.

And I'm not talking about the title of mechanic, or welder, or inspector.

I'm talking about the title of Master Shipbuilder.

Congratulations -- and thank you again for your commitment to Newport News.