

**Kirk Harris discusses his career as a skilled trades toolmaker and
UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

[clicking]

6Doreen Howard: [3 0:00].

8Doug Rademacher: Good morning. I'm Doug Rademacher. I'm here with the Fisher Body
9 Historical Team and we're here today with Kirk D. Harris and he is a, uh,
10 toolmaker tradesman and we are in the Fisher Body Plant and it is
11 approximately 11:20 on this October 11th, 2005. Good morning. [0:25]
12 Uh, Kirk, would you please tell your name and address for the record?

14Kirk Harris: Uh, Kirk D. Harris. Um, live at 7490 Round Lake Road and that's in
15 Laingsburg, Michigan.

17Doug Rademacher: Okay. [0:40] And are you married?

19Kirk Harris: Yes.

21Doug Rademacher: [0:42] Do you have any children?

23Kirk Harris: I have two, uh, children; uh, a boy, uh, that's, uh, 25 years old and a
24 daughter that's, uh, 23 years old.

26Doug Rademacher: [0:53] Do you have any grandchildren?

28Kirk Harris: I have one grandchild.

30Female: [Inaudible 0:58].

32Doug Rademacher: Congratulations. [0:59] Uh, would you tell us a little bit about your
33 education?

35Kirk Harris: Well, uh, I course graduated from high school and, um, and then when I got
36 into the tra-, or I attended a, a few classes at, uh, Mid Michigan
37 Community College, which is up in Harrison, uh, before I got hired in. So
38 I, I started, I started in Auto, Auto, uh, Mechanics curricliu-, curriculum up
39 there, um, before, before I got called to come work at, uh, at General
40 Motors in Lansing, uh, at Plant 1, um, Local 652. Uh, that's where I
41 originally hired in at, but, um, I started y-, I was just waiting to be called
42 and I wanted to get somethin' started so I started that, but, uh, those plans
43 changed real quick. [laughter]

45Doreen Howard: [1:56] What was your original hire date?

1Kirk Harris: Um, it was July 26th of '73. So it's been adjusted a little bit from the date
2 that I had on my, on my, uh, form there, or sheet, data sheet, um, because I
3 was laid off for a period of time, after 10 months. Originally hired in at
4 Plant 2, um, but yeah. Axle Plant. We made the rear differentials for the,
5 for the cars.
6

7Linda Johnson: Now you said you went to s-, to high school up north.
8

9Kirk Harris: Yeah.
10

11Linda Johnson: [2:36] What brought you to the Lansing area?
12

13Kirk Harris: Well, my dad, uh, originally was a toolmaker, or a tool designer, at, uh,
14 Building 40 in 652 Local here in Lansing and he retired in, uh, in
15 September of '69, 1969, and, um, I was, uh, I was a, uh, freshman in high
16 school, so we moved, uh, my freshman year up to, uh, Farwell and I
17 finished my last 3 years a high school up there...
18

19Doreen Howard: [Hm 3:11].
20

21Kirk Harris: ...and graduated from Farwell High School, and my brother was still
22 working here as a toolmaker, Building 40, and, uh – the other local.
23 [laughter]
24

25Doug Rademacher: The other local.
26

27Kirk Harris: And, uh, we, uh – see, he, um, ya know, my dad working here and, and
28 him, they both kinda prompted me to come down and put my application
29 in, so I did.
30

31Doreen Howard: [distorted audio] [A little bit a 3:40] history to give ya a little bit of idea of
32 what, what the auto industry was like.
33

34Kirk Harris: Mm-hm.
35

36Doreen Howard: [3:48] Tell, tell us about when you hired in here and your first day comin'
37 in here.
38

39Kirk Harris: Um, at Fisher Body or, or...
40

41Doreen Howard: Here at Fisher Body.
42

43Kirk Harris: Oh.
44

45Doreen Howard: [Yeah 3:58].
46

1Kirk Harris: Um, well, I, I transferred over here a lot later, uh, in ninety-, in '98,
2 summer of '98. I took a Paragraph 96, uh, transfer with the instrumental
3 panel assembly line...
4

5Doreen Howard: Mm.
6

7Kirk Harris: ...when they moved that from, uh, Plant 1 over at Fisher Body. So I
8 brought [pen clicking] that, a Paragraph 97, or 96 allows me to bring all my
9 seniority with me. So I was fortunate, very fortunate there.
10

11Doreen Howard: Mm.
12

13Linda Johnson: [4:36] What's the – what – had – did you find, um, different between the
14 facility that you were at and then coming into Fisher Body?
15

16Kirk Harris: Well, my first impression was the-, well, smaller, course, physical. Ya
17 know, the first thing ya see when ya walk in the door is the, ya know, the
18 physical size or, or, ya know, and the, and the people. The people seemed
19 to be a lot more friendly. It was more like a, uh, I don't know what ya
20 wanna say, uh, a big family-type atmosphere more so. They were – they
21 greeted you [clicking] more when you came, came in the door and the
22 people you'd never even – that was my first day and I never even knew any
23 a the people and they...
24

25Doreen Howard: [Mm 5:31].
26

27Kirk Harris: ...they said good morning even though they didn't know me, which I
28 thought was, was somethin' that really was one of the first impressions I
29 had that really stuck in my mind.
30

31Linda Johnson: [Mm 5:40]. [5:42] What, what department did you go to?
32

33Kirk Harris: Well I went to, um, uh, General Assembly – well, we called it Trim at the
34 time. Um, and I went to work on, uh, instrument panel, uh, assembly line,
35 the fixture in there that we had and brought over here and some of it was
36 new, so – or a lot of it was new...
37

38Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
39

40Kirk Harris: ...so.
41

42Linda Johnson: [6:05] So was the work similar to the work that you had done at the other
43 [inaudible 6:11]?
44

45Kirk Harris: Um, well, yes and no. I mean, it was, uh, the same type of work, but
46 because we were introducing the GMX 130, um, in, in '99 – well, the '99

1 model year; '98 we started the – so we were in the process a changing. So
2 that made the jobs change a little bit because it was a different product, ya
3 know, it was a redesigned product, so it was different than, than it would be
4 if we'd just moved everything right over, uh.
5
6Doreen Howard: [6:47] So you, you came in here on the line. Now your current job is a
7 toolmaker.
8
9Kirk Harris: Well, I d-, I came over here as a toolmaker.
10
11Doreen Howard: You came over here...
12
13Kirk Harris: Yeah.
14
15Doreen Howard: ...as a toolmaker.
16
17Kirk Harris: Yup. I [inaudible 6:58]...
18
19Doreen Howard: [6:58] You were just assigned to the, the Trim Department?
20
21Kirk Harris: Yes.
22
23Doreen Howard: Okay.
24
25Kirk Harris: When I first came.
26
27Doreen Howard: [Okay 7:03].
28
29Kirk Harris: Well, that was where the, the, uh, job content that they moved from Plant 1
30 to Fisher Body at the time, ya know, came to that area, so I moved with
31 that, with that job content.
32
33Linda Johnson: [7:20] So...
34
35Kirk Harris: [Yeah 7:20].
36
37Linda Johnson: ...what is a toolmaker?
38
39Kirk Harris: Uh, a toolmaker, it really has a couple a different categories in the
40 toolmaker trade. Um, you have the toolmaker/jig repair was what they
41 were called until we combined trades. Um, it's where you, you – when
42 you're assigned to the floor like I was, you more or less repair the existing
43 equipment. When you're a toolmaker assigned to the tool room, you have
44 more job responsibilities, like – they change, they – you're actually, um,
45 making and ordering parts to make new tools that, that they're gonna use in
46 the production or the f-, the, in the Trim area or the Body area or

1 somethin'. You, you, you're basically given a stack a prints and then you
2 order the steel and, and, uh, actually make it into a finished product,
3 whether you have to have help from a lathe operator or mill operator, um,
4 you assign them and then the job, the part, to make the part, and then you
5 assemble it and you make it work the way the engineer intended it to be...
6
7 Linda Johnson: [8:36] So...
8
9 Kirk Harris: ...[inaudible 8:37].
10
11 Linda Johnson: ...so you made tools that assisted the production...
12
13 Kirk Harris: Right. Yeah. And...
14
15 Linda Johnson: ...[inaudible 8:41]?
16
17 Kirk Harris: ...that helps make their job easier, um, inserting, ya know, inserting
18 grommets or making a grommet tool to insert grommets in areas or that are
19 hard to get at or makin' it easier to push, uh, a push clip on with, uh, an
20 assist, or as complex as making a tool that they pick up an instrument panel
21 off the conveyor and install it in the car. So it's, it's a wide-range, uh –
22 that's what kinda makes a toolmaker's trade interesting and, ya know, you
23 have different projects that you're given and they usually end up, ya know,
24 bein', being something that, uh, is kinda unique or you make just 2 or 4 of
25 and, ya know, it's somethin' that, uh, let's you be creative a little bit too.
26 So...
27
28 Doreen Howard: Mm.
29
30 Kirk Harris: ...it kinda – it's real interesting.
31
32 Doug Rademacher: [9:37] Kirk, you said your dad was a toolmaker, your brother was a...
33
34 Kirk Harris: A...
35
36 Doug Rademacher: ...toolmaker...
37
38 Kirk Harris: ...designer.
39
40 Doug Rademacher: A designer.
41
42 Marilyn Coulter: Designer.
43
44 Kirk Harris: Yup, [inaudible 9:44].
45
46 Doug Rademacher: [9:43] And your brother was a toolmaker?

1
2Kirk Harris: Yes.
3
4Doug Rademacher: And you were a toolmaker.
5
6Kirk Harris: Yeah.
7
8Doug Rademacher: [9:47] Now you said you have a son?
9
10Kirk Harris: Yes.
11
12Doug Rademacher: Has he considered toolmaking...
13
14Kirk Harris: Um...
15
16Doug Rademacher: ...or is it...
17
18Kirk Harris: ...no...
19
20Doug Rademacher: ...[inaudible 9:53]?
21
22Kirk Harris: ...he's, uh, he's into the medical field now. He's studying to be a registered
23 nurse.
24
25Doreen Howard: Oh.
26
27Kirk Harris: So...
28
29Doreen Howard: That's [inaudible 9:59].
30
31Kirk Harris: ...little break in the, uh, tradition there. [laughter]
32
33Doug Rademacher: [10:04] Is there any other family members that work at Fisher Body in
34 your, in your family or your...
35
36Kirk Harris: Um...
37
38Doug Rademacher: ...cousins or?
39
40Kirk Harris: ...not in, not in my immediate family.
41
42Doug Rademacher: Oh.
43
44Kirk Harris: My brother, my older brother, did work at, uh, um – I don't think he ever
45 worked at Fisher Body, but he worked at Plant 1, uh, for a short period a
46 time during the summer when he was getting his degree in, uh, engineering

1 at Michigan State. So he worked here a few – a couple a summers, ya
2 know, for, uh, summer help.
3
4 Doug Rademacher: [10:43] So your experience here at Fisher Body, you said you were able to
5 utilize the bargained, uh, language that was negotiated, um, [papers
6 shuffling] is the 96 move [papers shuffling] **inaudible** 10:55].
7
8 Kirk Harris: [**Mm** 10:55].
9
10 Doug Rademacher: ...when over half of your work goes, you had to travel with it. That [tap],
11 [**so you** 11:00] found the – did you ever, uh, regret coming over to Fisher
12 Body or has it been a...
13
14 Kirk Harris: No, it was a, it was a pretty good experience. Um, I've made couple a
15 moves, um, back and forth between – not, not – well, I came from Local
16 1618 where I originally hired in at, over to 652 Local, and there was a little
17 bit of – it seemed like a little bit of, uh, apathy or, ya know, resentment, I
18 should say, towards the people that came from Plant 2 to 652, but when I
19 came from that lo-, from 652 Local over here at Fisher Body, 602 Local,
20 there didn't really seem to be that resentment. There was, I mean, even
21 people that I had passed in seniority [tap] with that move, uh, um, didn't
22 really, I mean, never really had the resentment that I thought they would
23 have.
24
25 Doug Rademacher: [12:07] They respected your seniority and...
26
27 Kirk Harris: Well...
28
29 Doug Rademacher: ...[**inaudible** 12:09]?
30
31 Kirk Harris: ...yeah, yes. Ya know, there was a few s-, well there was a couple, maybe
32 1 or 2 people outta the whole, 'cause I went ahead of almost everybody,
33 everybody here when I came over. I was #9, I think, on the seniority list
34 outta 48 or 50 when I first came over here, so I went by a lotta people.
35 [laughter]
36
37 Marilyn Coulter: [**Oh** 12:30].
38
39 Kirk Harris: And, uh, there was only a couple of per-, people that really, ya know, ya
40 know, made a verbal, uh, res-, ya know...
41
42 Doreen Howard: [**Inaudible** 12:44].
43
44 Kirk Harris: ...verbally resented, ya know, resented me. Th-, I mean there was probably
45 some that were silent, but [laughter], ya know, they still, they still treated
46 me with respect and, ya know, and everything. So I thought, I think it was

1 also the fact that a lot of the toolmakers have come from other plants. Ya
2 know, they've come from Col-, [Coldwater 13:06] Road, ya know, Fisher
3 in Coldwater Road and Flint and Detroit and, and there were even some, ya
4 know, some guys from Grand Rapids and, and Kalamazoo that I've worked
5 with. So they're, they're all, ya know, a big melting pot here it seems like.
6 So I think that, that helped too, because they'd all been in my shoes at one
7 time or another, ya know? And uh...

8

9Doreen Howard: [13:30] Like other skilled trades, did the toolmakers work in pairs?

10

11Kirk Harris: Not, not really, unless it was a large project. Um, you, you more or less
12 worked, uh, worked on a project by yourself, um, unless it was heavy
13 enough or, you know, uh, physically it was demanding that there was 2
14 people there to, to help. Um, there's a lotta those projects that were, ya
15 know, big rails and stuff where it actually taking 2 per-, 2 people to
16 install'm. So there's plenty – there many a times you work, uh, work as a
17 pair or as a team of 3 or 4 people.

18

19Doug Rademacher: [14:18] You've worked at different assembly – or different plants, you said,
20 so what did you see as far as when you came to Fisher Body, how did the,
21 uh, tradespeople treat men and women of different color in the trades
22 [group 14:37]?

23

24Kirk Harris: I, I never really saw any – I mean, it, it, it really – over here it seemed like
25 that we were all one, one big family. I mean, I never really saw any, any
26 type of racism whatsoever. Um, it was more of a, I don't wanna say a
27 country atmosphere, but it was more of a small – what would you call, a
28 small-town atmosphere compared to a large city atmosphere. That would
29 be the, the bigge-, the best comparison I could see. And, and just like in
30 small cities, um, racism doesn't seem to be an issue as much as it is in
31 larger cities.

32

33Marilyn Coulter: [15:32] Uh, um, Kurt, are there many women toolmakers?

34

35Kirk Harris: Uh, over here, there, there is none. Uh, there were, there were a couple a
36 women toolmakers that I never had a chance to work with over here. Uh,
37 where I did come from, ya know, where I did, where I – I shoulda
38 [laughter] [worded 15:54] that better so it sounds better. Uh, where I came,
39 the plant I came from, yes, there was, uh, there was 4 or 5, uh, women...

40

41Marilyn Coulter: Women toolmakers?

42

43Kirk Harris: ...women toolmakers I worked with.

44

1 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [16:07] So off [kinda 16:08] bein' a toolmaker, were you able to
2 like help the operators on the line in s-, terms of making tools for them to
3 work and use on the line?
4

5 Kirk Harris: Over here more so, because, uh, my job assignment was to, ya know, to
6 service the, the tools that were on the line. So that was my main – one of
7 my main, uh, job, uh, requirements was to try to, to make, uh, the, uh, the
8 production people's...
9

10 Marilyn Coulter: [Mm-hm 16:41].
11

12 Kirk Harris: ...job easier. That's was, that was part of our, actually part of our job,
13 really.
14

15 Marilyn Coulter: [16:47] So did the oper-...
16

17 Kirk Harris: I felt.
18

19 Marilyn Coulter: ...did the operators help you figure out how to make a tool that would be
20 good for...
21

22 Kirk Harris: Oh yes.
23

24 Marilyn Coulter: ...them?
25

26 Kirk Harris: Yeah, they, they had a lotta good suggestions, a lotta very good suggestions
27 that you could, could use, uh, on what they thought they needed, ya know?
28 Then I would take it back and, and try to refine it so it would, ya know, be
29 a durable tool and...
30

31 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
32

33 Kirk Harris: ...be something that they could still use.
34

35 Doug Rademacher: [17:17] This plant's recognized as Fisher Body, but it's had many names.
36 When you came over, was it the BOC, Buick-Olds-Cadillac Group, or was
37 it already the Lansing Car Assembly? LCA.
38

39 Kirk Harris: Well, really, it was in transition, I think, more or less. Uh, I think they'd,
40 they'd, they'd taken down the sign. I don't remember what it said when I
41 first came over here, but they switched the signs out by [inaudible 17:44]
42 Street, so [laughter] whatever that was, the last switch they made out there.
43 I think it said BOC...
44

45 Marilyn Coulter: [Mm 17:50].
46

1Kirk Harris: ...and then it was shortly after I came over here that they, that they did
2 make the change, so then it was – so it was right, right, I came over here
3 right about at the, the transition time. I think that was when they made that
4 transition, when we went to the GMX 130.
5

6Doug Rademacher: [18:06] And what do, what do you call the plant today?
7

8Kirk Harris: Plant 6.
9
10 [laughter]
11

12Kirk Harris: [laughter] That's what everybody refers to it as, so I, uh, ya know, it's kind
13 of everybody has their own name, I think. Lotta people still call it Fisher
14 Body. [laughter]
15

16Doug Rademacher: [18:23] [I was tryin' to say 18:23]...
17
18 [laughter]
19

20Doug Rademacher: ...I was wondering when you put your transfer in, did you say that you were
21 goin' to Fisher Body or...
22

23Kirk Harris: Yes.
24

25Doug Rademacher: ['Cause 18:28]...
26

27Kirk Harris: Yes. That's, that's what it...
28

29Doug Rademacher: ...'cause that's...
30

31Kirk Harris: ...that's what it said on it, as a matter a fact; uh, Fisher Body Plant 6 I think
32 is what the, the paperwork actually said on it.
33

34Marilyn Coulter: [18:36] So now when you came into the tools and stuff like that, [inaudible
35 18:39] that the other plant had, did they have like, um, initiations for the
36 tools when you came in?
37

38Kirk Harris: Not, not really. No, no...
39

40Marilyn Coulter: [No? 18:51]
41

42Kirk Harris: ...it was...
43

44Marilyn Coulter: [There were no 18:51] pranks or anything that were played on you?
45

46Kirk Harris: I'm sorry?

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: No pranks were played on you when you came over?
3
4 Kirk Harris: No. No, um, no, they greeted me real, uh, ya know, [just like 19:00]
5 [clicking] real – a friend, ya know what I mean? They, they, there was
6 nothin’ that – like I say, there was...
7
8 Marilyn Coulter: Or no funny jokes?
9
10 Kirk Harris: ...no, uh, apathy really whatsoever or, ya know, resentment or, or any type
11 of initiation, or, no...
12
13 Marilyn Coulter: [Oh, okay 19:18].
14
15 Kirk Harris: ...never saw anything.
16
17 Doug Rademacher: [19:20] What was the supervisory style from the Fisher Body compared to
18 where the other plants that you’d worked?
19
20 Kirk Harris: Um, the, um, the people I was introduced to when I first came over here –
21 well and a course my first context was with, was with the union, um, the,
22 the, uh – we called it the Chairman of the Shop Committee. What’s it
23 called? Zone. You use the term zone here.
24
25 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
26
27 Kirk Harris: And, uh, and the, the committeemen, floor committeemen, were the first 2
28 people I met, and that was a, a lotta difference, um, there. And then, they
29 took me to the management group and, uh, I could tell right then it was
30 gonna be a lot, a lot better as far as, uh, not usin’, using their authority,
31 tryin’ to use their, their, uh, management skills more than, than just, ya
32 know, usin’ their authority and the, the iron-fisted – I was more, more used
33 to the, um, I’m the, I’m the boss, I’m your manager, you’re gonna do what
34 I say and your opinion doesn’t count-type management, and when you
35 came over here, they more or less said, “You’re gonna be the toolmaker in
36 General Assembly. Now, we wanna give you whatever you need to do
37 your job and we want ya you to do it in the way you feel needs to be done.”
38 So it was a completely different job, I – or a completely different
39 management style, I feel.
40
41 Linda Johnson: Lot more respect for the employee and their...
42
43 Kirk Harris: And their opinion.
44
45 Linda Johnson: ...opinions?
46

1Kirk Harris: Yeah. Have a lot more respect for, um, your ability to create what you
2 needed to do, ya know, or you needed to do to get the job done. Um,
3 where, where I came f-, where I originally came from was they gave you
4 something and they'd say, "We want you to do it this way," which was
5 always never... well, which...
6

7Linda Johnson: [laughter]
8

9Kirk Harris: ...I mean, 90 percent a the time, it was the correct way, and it was probably
10 more efficient, but...
11

12Linda Johnson: [But it never was 21:50]...
13

14Kirk Harris: ...over here they, they let you – even though you may around, ya know, you
15 got different routes of, of the way you can get to your end...
16

17Linda Johnson: Mm-hm.
18

19Kirk Harris: ...end result. You can either go – it's hard to explain. It's, ya know, you've
20 got so many different ways you can accomplish what you want to
21 accomplish. So they let you do as long as you did the right jo-, or did the
22 right thing or came up with the right thing was good.
23

24Doreen Howard: [22:22] Was there a particular supervisor that you could say was your
25 favorite or, or...
26

27Kirk Harris: Well...
28

29Doreen Howard: ...and employee that you [sniffing] really enjoyed...
30

31Kirk Harris: ...the, the supervisor...
32

33Doreen Howard: ...[the comradery 22:35]...
34

35Kirk Harris: ...that I had when I first came in was [Joe Trevino 22:37] and, uh, he, he
36 was the supervisor that I, that I first met and worked for and he was the one
37 that, ya know, I got, that I got the impression from, and [Don Davis 22:52]
38 were the first 2 people that I met. Well, Don Davis was actually the first
39 person, and then he called Joe Trevino to come up and take me to my, to
40 my work area, and, um, they, they actually greeted me like, like, like
41 friends, not like sittin' behind a desk and, ya know, had their big iron fist
42 out, ready to tell me what to do. Uh, they actually greeted you more like a,
43 like a friend or a brother or whatever rather than, ya know – and they, they
44 helped you out and they, ya know, told you whatever you need that was –
45 like I said before, they're the – ya know, whatever, whatever you need to
46 get your job done, they were able to – ya know, they said, "If we can, we'll

1 provide it for ya"[papers shuffling] and they did too. [It was real 23:41], a
2 lot more helpful, I feel.
3
4 Doreen Howard: [23:45] Did you, um – you said you found a lot of comradery with the
5 employees. Was there any particular, um, coworker that, that you did a lot
6 of things here in the plant or outside a the plant with?
7
8 Kirk Harris: Well, I've always – I've never been one to socialize very much outside a
9 the plant with any of my coworkers. I, I don't know if it was never because
10 I had anything in common with any of'm that I really knew well. Um,
11 there's been a few people that I've met outside but I, I've never really
12 associated much with the people that I worked with, uh, social, a social
13 gathering. Um, but as far as being in here, there's been a couple a
14 toolmakers that really were – went outta their way to be nice to me when I
15 first came in, even though one person was the one that I had just passed by
16 only a couple a weeks' seniority, and he was the person that Joe Trevino
17 put me with to, um, to break me in, so to speak, or to, to help me learn my
18 job or job responsibilities.
19
20 Doreen Howard: Mm.
21
22 Kirk Harris: He was probably the closest friend I had in here.
23
24 Doreen Howard: Mm. [25:07] Did you ever get involved in any of the, um, dinners or
25 lunchtime activities with s-...
26
27 Doug Rademacher: [Oh yeah 25:16].
28
29 Doreen Howard: ...with anyone here?
30
31 Kirk Harris: Yeah.
32
33 Doreen Howard: What, what kinda things did ya do?
34
35 Kirk Harris: Oh, just mostly like the retirement dinners or, or, or that. Um, we'd go out,
36 uh, we'd go out every – for some special occasion, we'd go over to the bar,
37 go over to Harry's for lunchtime meal, and, uh, that was about it.
38
39 Doreen Howard: That's a pretty common activities amongst all the...
40
41 Kirk Harris: Yeah. [laughter]
42
43 Doreen Howard: ...all the different groups that we've talked with so far.
44
45 Kirk Harris: Yup. Yeah, Harry's was pretty, pretty good, uh, gathering place for
46 everybody.

1
2Doreen Howard: [26:02] Now, in your time that you were here, um, could-, s-, talk a little bit
3 about the changes that you've seen happen as far as, um, your job and the,
4 the facility itself, some a the changes that, that you've noticed over the, the
5 timeframe that you've been here.
6
7Kirk Harris: Well, the, uh – when I first got here, I noticed that, that, um, Sanitation
8 seemed to, to keep the plant real nice; a lot, a lot better than what was used
9 to. A course I was used to a, uh, machining operation more, more so than,
10 than what, uh, we have over here, so it was a dirtier operation over at Plant
11 1 and some a the areas I'd gotten moved to when we started our reductions
12 over there, like the Engine Plant, uh, Plant 5, was a lot dirtier, so. But
13 Plant... what Sanitation always seemed to – that's – well, the thing I noticed
14 that really stuck in my mind was sealing the floors; we never did that. And
15 Sanitation, every, uh, weekend it seemed like they were, ya know, cleaning
16 and s-, and sealing different areas of the plant, and it was on a rut-, ongoing
17 cycle, but we kinda, in the last year or 2, dropped that, ya know, with the,
18 with the closing of the plant and everything. So that kinda went away. I –
19 that's one thing that stuck in my mind that was one a the first things when I
20 first came over here that I really thought was kinda...
21
22Marilyn Coulter: [27:38] Kirk...
23
24Kirk Harris: ...neat.
25
26Marilyn Coulter: ...for the people who may not know what that is, could you explain what
27 sealin' the floor with Sanitation [is 27:43]?
28
29Kirk Harris: Well, what they would do is they would come in on a weekend and they
30 would, they would rope off an area, an [aisle, like 27:51], mostly the aisle
31 ways. They, they did some, some work areas and that, but then they would
32 take a scrubber, one of our power scrubbers, and they would clean the floor
33 and try to get it as clean as possible and, and free of grease and oil and
34 everything, and then they would go over it and seal it with a, almost looked
35 like a lacquer it was so shiny, uh, and then, the, the aisle ways every – I
36 always liked those aisle ways after they did that. They seemed brighter
37 and, and, um, and actually made ya feel a little bit better, I felt, ya know,
38 because it was actually clean and shiny and – didn't look new, but it was
39 different, I guess. [laughter]
40
41Marilyn Coulter: Looks clean and shiny.
42
43Doreen Howard: [28:42] Um, how do you feel when you look around now, being one a the
44 few people that are still here in the, in the building and, and all the
45 machines and the people and most a the stuff is, is gone? How – what,
46 what are your feelings on the building and what you see around you now?

1
2Kirk Harris: Well, I have a hard time, I have a hard time comin' back into the plant. Uh,
3 the first, first time I came back in, um, when we shut down, June 6th – or
4 May 6th, I, I stayed on, um, working, I didn't take a layoff or anything, and
5 I went – they moved me right into the, uh, Early Involvement, or the, the s-,
6 Delta Project. So, I was away for a few weeks when, uh – with the
7 schooling and everything that they send you through and that they started
8 out with my GMS right away, so, and that. So I, I was away from probably
9 3 weeks without comin' back in, and then when I came in, it was almost
10 like walking – it w-, it felt, to me, like a graveyard, really. I mean, there
11 was a lot of, of – it was dark and, and dingy and there wasn't, ya know, the
12 – even the people that you'd – that were here that you met, they weren't as
13 happy and smiling or anything like it was. It was almost like somebody
14 had died is what it – the way it kinda felt, really. Or something, I should
15 say; somebody, not someth-, or not somebody but something had died.
16 And, ya know, it was just a, a sad time.
17
18Marilyn Coulter: [30:37] So...
19
20Kirk Harris: It felt a lot different.
21
22Marilyn Coulter: ...Kirk, you said that you were working with the Delta Project.
23
24Kirk Harris: Yes.
25
26Marilyn Coulter: And that is-, the Delta Project is what?
27
28Kirk Harris: Is the new plant...
29
30Marilyn Coulter: Okay.
31
32Kirk Harris: ...[the, uh 30:49]...
33
34Marilyn Coulter: [30:49] And so, um, you're gonna be – so how does it feel to be able to
35 maybe close the doors of one plant while you open the doors of another?
36
37Kirk Harris: Well, it was, it was a big help to go right to that program because, ya know,
38 you didn't have that feeling a loss for very long 'cause you knew that there
39 was a new beginning right around the corner. So, uh, it feels, it feels good
40 to be able to, to start something that soon after the closing a the other plant
41 – or the, ya know, this plant, but, um, it – I still, I still have bittersweet
42 memories a the old, the old style, which – and everything. It's gonna – it's
43 kinda hard to, to get into the, the feel a things. As soon as you start seeing,
44 I guess I see the first car go down the line out there, first vehicle go down
45 the line out there, I think I'll really know that somethin's happening, but.
46

1Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
2

3Linda Johnson: [32:02] Will you be in the same job title...
4

5Kirk Harris: Yes.
6

7Linda Johnson: ...at the new facility?
8

9Kirk Harris: Yes. Yeah, I'll be a toolmaker out there.
10

11Linda Johnson: [32:09] And will your job responsibilities be the same? Will they change
12 in any way from what you, um, had h-, in this facility?
13

14Kirk Harris: Well, I think with the, ya know, introduction of, um, GMS, which is, uh,
15 Global Manufacturing System, all of our jobs are prolly gonna change a lot,
16 it looks like. Um, it's gonna be hard to see – as a matter a fact, right after
17 this meeting, I have another meeting to go to on our job, what our, um, our
18 team leader and group leader jobs are gonna look like. Uh, that's what the
19 meeting is I'm gonna go to after this one. So and that's all gonna be
20 redefined as a lot different and everything, so it's gonna be a big change.
21

22Doug Rademacher: [32:59] Did you ever have, through your trade, a project that, uh, you
23 remember as, say, your best job? Somethin' that you did or created outta
24 your toolmaking skills that you really saw the rewards with for somebody
25 in the plant?
26

27Kirk Harris: Well, uh, you mean over here or at, or at my – any of the toolmaking?
28

29Doug Rademacher: Well, preferably here.
30

31Kirk Harris: [Right 33:23].
32

33Doug Rademacher: Is there anything ya did here or?
34

35Kirk Harris: Well, some a the, uh – we've made some, we've made some refinements
36 and stuff in machines for the Body Shop, and I was involved with working
37 through overtime, uh, with working on those, and, and some a the, the
38 machines we created or, or enhancements for machines that we created
39 were, were real interesting, uh, but the best, the most satisfying [tap] job I
40 had was over at, uh, at Plant 1, 652, was working in Experimental. That
41 was really – worked in Experimental for about 7 or 8 years before they
42 moved that to Pontiac, and, uh, that was probably – I mean, I actually
43 looked forward to goin' to work every day there because you were working
44 with, uh, ya know, products 2, 3, 4 years down the road and, and, uh,
45 helping the designers and the, and the, and the engineers that were, ya

1 know, designing the future vehicles. That, uh, was really nice to work
2 with.
3

4Doreen Howard: [34:36] Um, you said you had a family background of General Motors, uh,
5 employees. I was just curious, um, what type a vehicle do you drive? Do
6 you drive...
7

8Kirk Harris: Do I drive...
9

10Doreen Howard: ...one of our...
11

12Kirk Harris: ...or own?
13

14Doreen Howard: ...products?
15

16 [laughter]
17

18Doreen Howard: Do you drive any of the products that, that you, um, built or?
19

20Kirk Harris: Uh, yes, I, I have – as a matter of fact, I have a 1976 Oldsmobile that I still
21 – a Cutlass, that I still, uh, have stored and, um, we drove Cutlasses – or we
22 drove Oldsmobiles right up until we had a, a 2000, uh, Alero, and, uh, we
23 both, we both at the time – and now my wife drives a Chevy Trailblazer
24 and I drive a, uh, a Silverado pickup, but, uh, um, we also have a, uh,
25 Pontiac Trans Am that we have stored also. So we're a General Motors
26 family, definitely.
27

28Doug Rademacher: [35:49] What is, um, the most appreciated bargained benefit that you've
29 come to appreciate through the bargaining process, um, with the UAW and,
30 and the corporation?
31

32Kirk Harris: Well that's a hard [laughter], hard one to think. There's so many. It's hard
33 to pick the best one. Uh, I would say probably – it's, it's really not very
34 glamorous until you have a, till you have a problem or where ya really need
35 it, but I would say the medical benefits, I think, are probably the most
36 practical and the best and, and, ya know, would be the, the biggest money-
37 saver if ever you had a real serious, ya know, medical issue.
38

39Doug Rademacher: Absolutely, and I do know that, uh, the only greater than the, makin' a
40 good wage is, is having your health. So as we get older and closer to our
41 retirement, I know that's a real concern of ours. [36:59] Um, you said
42 when you hired in here that you were greeted by your, uh, Zone Committee
43 and District Committeeman...
44

45Kirk Harris: Mm-hm.
46

1 Doug Rademacher: ...and you said, uh, you felt a, a, a rapport with, when you were taken to
2 meet management by them. Uh, can you talk about your union, 602, and
3 did you go to union meetings?
4

5 Kirk Harris: Um, I never really went to many union meetings until I got involved with
6 the, uh, the new Delta Township Program, because I was always – the
7 things that I was involved with outside of the shop, uh, didn't lend very
8 well to the, to the union meeting dates, and that's probably really no
9 excuse; I should've made [tap], made – now that I see what goes on with
10 the union and everything, I see more I shoulda made more time for that,
11 but, uh, um, ya know.
12

13 Doug Rademacher: [38:02] Well, as you say that, what, what do you see now with the union
14 that, that you feel that maybe you missed a part of?
15

16 Kirk Harris: The – well, I guess the whole democratic procedure and, um, that goes on
17 there, really, is, is really good to be involved with. Uh, ya know, the, uh,
18 being able to vote and make decisions and, and your vote actually counts,
19 ya know, and, and actually being able to, to, uh, be able to stand up in an
20 open meeting and, and address concerns or, or, uh, or needs. But as I, as I
21 get older, I feel more, more and more involved with that type a stuff
22 because I can actually see, ya know, where, ya know, when you're
23 younger, ya just, you don't, you don't take that into consideration as much
24 and I don't think you appreciate the benefits that the unions negotiated for
25 you much, as much until you get older. [laughter]
26

27 Linda Johnson: [39:21] On the same note, um, is there any words of wisdom that you
28 would offer anyone that's young that's, uh, maybe gonna be coming into
29 General Motors or our new plant? We may be hiring new people at some
30 point. Is there any words of wisdom that you would maybe pass onto
31 them?
32

33 Kirk Harris: Well, I, I feel that, um, knowing what I've been through, the best thing I
34 ever did was to, was to start going back to school and, and get into the
35 trades. Uh, not, not because there's more money involved or anything –
36 that, I mean, that's a nice benefit – but the, it seems like the more training I
37 got, the more secure my job got. When I was on production, uh, when I
38 first hired in, it didn't seem like there was that much there to keep me there,
39 but as soon as I started getting more training and when I got accepted into
40 the apprenticeship program and it just seems like General Motors is
41 investing more and more money in me and it made my job more and more
42 secured the more I learned. So I guess that's what I would suggest, ya
43 know, to somebody is to get involved with bettering, bettering yourself as
44 soon as possible to try to work up the ladder, whether it be in management
45 or, or either, whatever – or engineering or, or whatever they feel, feel the

1 most, um, ya know, draw to would be to, ya know, try to get, ya know,
2 move up the ladder at General Motors as quick as possible.
3
4 Marilyn Coulter: [41:20] So actually you think that they should utilize that UAW [inaudible
5 41:25] negotiated benefit of the Education Tuition [Refund 41:28].
6
7 Kirk Harris: Oh definitely. That's a very good resource to use. I've used it. My
8 family's used it. So that's a very good benefit.
9
10 Marilyn Coulter: [Thank you 41:39].
11
12 Doug Rademacher: [41:39] Kirk, you said you didn't attend union meetings because it didn't fit
13 into your schedule outside a here. Did your trade of the skills you have
14 carry over outside a the plant? Have you done things in your community,
15 uh, with the knowledge that you've got through your trade that in, either in
16 your communities or somethin' you do for your neighbors or something
17 like that where you've seen your trade actually help others outside of
18 [inaudible 42:08]?
19
20 Kirk Harris: Oh yeah. I've, uh, I've worked with the Vocational Partment, Department
21 at our local school, um, the, um, a [VoTech 42:19], uh, instructor. I
22 worked with him quite a bit when my, my children were in high school.
23
24 Doug Rademacher: [42:26] That'd be Laingsburg?
25
26 Kirk Harris: Yes. And, um, I, I much as got him some, uh, got the kids some tutors
27 through, through the departments and stuff and the Tool Room and that. So
28 worked with that and also I've helped my neighbors quite a bit because I
29 have a f-, a few piece-, a few machines, old machines that I picked up over
30 a period a years and I do a little bit of, little bit a work, uh, in the garage for
31 people, plus with the things I did, ya know, for entertainment, I really,
32 really used a lotta my trade, uh, experience.
33
34 Doreen Howard: [43:05] What are – what is that? What do you do for...
35
36 Kirk Harris: Well, I've...
37
38 Doreen Howard: ...[inaudible 43:09]?
39
40 Kirk Harris: ...I've, we've, uh, worked with, uh, racing model boats and...
41
42 Doreen Howard: Oh.
43
44 Kirk Harris: ...and, uh, and then we, we raced – when my kids got a little older, they
45 both raced, uh, Quarter Midgets for, for us, we owned a race team for a

1 while, and that's when we'd be traveling all every weekend when we were
2 doin' that kinda thing.
3
4Doreen Howard: Might be a lotta fun.
5
6Kirk Harris: Right now I'm flying radio-controlled airplanes. So I use a lotta my, um,
7 trade to...
8
9Doreen Howard: Knowledge, yeah.
10
11Kirk Harris: ...build – I make most a my own parts, so I use – just about every weekend
12 I use my trade that I learned in here.
13
14 [laughter]
15
16Doreen Howard: [Yeah 43:51].
17
18Doug Rademacher: Well that's wonderful. [43:54] Do you h-, uh, is there any question you
19 feel we haven't asked of you? Do you – is there somethin' you'd like to
20 share that we haven't touched on?
21
22Kirk Harris: Not that I can really think of, no. [laughter] Pretty thorough. [laughter]
23
24Doug Rademacher: Anybody have anything? Okay. Well, it's been a wonderful, uh,
25 opportunity to meet you, Kirk, and we appreciate your time and your
26 interview today.
27
28Kirk Harris: Well...
29
30Doug Rademacher: Good luck on your new...
31
32Kirk Harris: ...thank you.
33
34Doug Rademacher: ...endeavors at the Delta Plant.
35
36Kirk Harris: Yup.
37
38Doreen Howard: Thank you.
39
40Kirk Harris: We'll do our best. Thank you.
41
42Doreen Howard: Um...
43
44Marilyn Coulter: The name of the interviewers.
45
46Doreen Howard: Yeah. Uh, Doreen Howard.

1
2Linda Johnson: Linda Johnson.
3
4Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
5
6Doug Rademacher: And Doug Rademacher.
7
8Doreen Howard: Thank you.
9
10Linda Johnson: Bye.
11
12Doug Rademacher: I forgot to do that when we start-...
13
14 [clicking]
15
16
17/rt