Earnest James Zubkus discusses his career in General Motors and as the Plant Manager of the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI

Cheryl McQuaid: This is the Fisher Body Historical Team. We are at the Union Hall and we are interviewing former plant manager Jim Zubkus and present today and this is Wednesday, October 18, 2005.

Doug Rademacher: 19th.

Cheryl McQuaid: 19, 2005, and it is about 10…11:15.

Michael Flemming: I am Michael Flemming.

Doug Rademacher: Doug Rademacher.

Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard.

Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.

John Fedewa: John Fedewa.

Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.

Linda Johnson: And Linda Johnson.

Cheryl McQuaid: [00:33] Uh, Jim, could you, uh, tell us your name and spell your last name for us please and your address and go ahead.

Jim Zubkus: My name is really Earnest, E-A-R-N-E-S-T, Earnest James Zubkus. I go by Jim. My address is 2464 Emerald Lake Drive that's East Lansing, Michigan 48823.

Cheryl McQuaid: [00:57] And, uh, you're married, Jim?

Jim Zubkus: Yes, I am. I've been married for 43 years to the same woman. She's a lucky girl.

[laughter]

Cheryl McQuaid: [01:08] And how many children do you have?

Jim Zubkus: I have four children and seven grandchildren.

Cheryl McQuaid: Wow. [01:13] And names or…

Jim Zubkus: I have, uh, my oldest is my son Jim and then my two daughters are in the middle, Janet and Jennifer, and the youngest is John.

Cheryl McQuaid: [01:23] And did you serve in the military?

Jim Zubkus: Yes, I did. I served in the United States Navy.

Cheryl McQuaid: [01:27] And your education, where'd you go to school? Get it out front now.

Jim Zubkus: From high school on, from high school on I went to a small school just south of Pittsburgh called Munhall High School. From there I went to the University of Michigan, and then from there I went to the Darden School of Finance at the University of Virginia, and I also went, and a lot of people don't know this, I also went to the military Army Work College in Canal, Pennsylvania. I was sent there by General Motors.

Cheryl McQuaid: [01:58] And, uh, when did you start work for General Motors?

Jim Zubkus: June of 1962.

Cheryl McQuaid: [02:03] And how did that come about?

Jim Zubkus: Uh, quite frankly, um, I had, uh, I always wanted to be a football coach and I went to school, uh, to be a football coach and, uh, when I got out of college, uh, I was accepted to Law School at the University of Michigan and I intended to go to law school and then come out of there and eventually teach and what have you, but, um, my wife, Betsy, at this time told me that General Motors was interviewing on campus and, uh, lo and behold I went to the interview and they offered me a job at Pontiac Motor Division starting at $480 a month. So I called my father and my folks, both my Mom and Dad are first generation. They are from what they call the old country. I am Lithuanian and they are Lithuanian, and I called my dad and I said, "Dad, um, it's either law school or I can take this job with General Motors for $480 a month", and he says, "Don't ever pass up that kind of money." [laughter] And so I started with General Motors as a clerk on third shift. That's as low on the food chain as you can get in salary, third shift clerk in tooling.

Chery McQuaid: [03:13] And then how did your career go from there?

Jim Zubkus: Well, I, um, I was a clerk for about probably 5 weeks and, um, salaried personnel came up to me and asked me if I would like to be a foreman, a supervisor on a line, but they called them a foreman back then, and, um, I didn't know what…so I said, "What does that mean?" They said, "We're going to take you from $480 to $500, $5 a week raise." I said, "Man, for

money like that you think I'm going to pass that up?" I feel like this $20 raise and so, um, I became a foreman probably late in 1962 and then from there I became a general foreman and Assistant Superintendent in the car assembly plant and from there I went to the Superintendent of Axle and Machining in General Motors and then from there I went as Plant Manager of the Metal Fabricating Plant. So I had experience in all ends of the manufacturing business for cars. Then I was given the opportunity to become superintendent of a brand new plant. It was the new 2.5 cylinder engine plant. They gave me a grass field and told me I could select my organization and build this plant to build engines, which exists today, today, still exists today in Pontiac. The plant is, they are not building engines anymore. From there I went to the hallowed job of going to downtown, going to Detroit. Boy that was terrible. That was a terrible duty for a manufacturing guy to go to Central Office and I was, um, in Central Office for about 20 months and, uh, a lot of folks don't know this but I was on the design team for the Pontiac Grand Am, which was called the "in" car at that time, and I left there and, uh, became Plant Manager at Arlington, Texas, and then I came to Lansing in 1989. I came to Lansing as, as Plant Manager of the plants here. So that was sort of my career.

Doug Rademacher: I want to ask you, um, a question. [05:20] As you are talking about the different jobs you had and started from the ground, give us the insight of you started at the clerk's position and you went into the frontline supervisor as you called them then foreman and as you were plant manager, how do you see the frontline supervisor's job then versus now? How much change has that become?

Jim Zubkus: Even though, um, there is animosity still exists between the frontline supervisor and his bargaining unit people, his workmen, it's not as it was back then. It, it was a we versus they kind of thing back then. It was very grievance laden kind of occupation. It was, uh, who could outsmart the other guy. Rather, there was nobody working together back then, and, of course, strikes were prominent back then and what have you. Um, it was, the environment was hostile. Today, it's much more, uh, amicable. People, people work together better. You always have that one, you know, that 10 percent either bargaining unit or management who don't get along, but 90 percent of the workforce really works together today because, quite frankly, if you don't hang together you're going to hang separately now.

John Fedewa: Certainly.

Cheryl McQuaid: [06:41] When you walked into the plant you're first day here, how…what was your first day like when you came to, uh, the Fisher Body plant?

Jim Zukus: Um, When I came into the plant here, um, I was welcomed because, uh, Frank Shotters' was a person who I, who I, uh, replaced. Frank Shotters'

and, uh, my personality are very, very much the same. In fact, they think that's why they selected me because I was sort of the same kind of manager that Frank was. We always believed in our people and you could get it done through your people and Frank made me feel right at home. I mean, uh, and then he took me on the floor and introduced me, uh, to my salary group and, um, the majority of them welcomed me, but you have to understand when you come in, come in as a new guy, um, there are a lot of people who think that they should have that job other than you and rightfully so. You know? I mean, they worked their life to get that position and all of the sudden here comes a new guy from the outside who they have never seen before and there is sort of a little, I don't want to call it friction, but it's just, you know, that you could feel it. You know, you could feel like a resentment. There is a resentment towards you and, um, you just have to understand that and overcome it and Frank helped that, helped that debate. Um, and I helped it too because you can only take resentment for so long and then somebody's then they have got to do their job so you've got to do what you've gotta do to straighten that out.

John Fedewa: Absolutely.

Linda Johnson: You were known for walking around the plant as, uh, [08:18] what did you see out on the floor when you were visiting and that was interesting to you and you'd come back and say, "oh my gosh, did you see that bear?"

Jim Zubkus: [laughter] Well, well, um, Linda, Linda let me say this, um, General Motors is people. People have got to understand that. Salary people, hourly people, union people, committeemen, foreman, whoever, General Motors is people. That's what it's all about and you know these are just buildings. They're just a building. There's nothing that happens in the buildings until the people walk in. Once the people walk in the air hoses start working, the lights go on, you know, the Andon System works, conveyors start moving, cars are built and all that, but it's all people and so you might as well, you might as well go where the action is. You know? You can't, you can't express your ideas or your feelings or what is important to you, uh, if you sit in your office and so the only way is you've got to take time and incidentally I do a lot of this, I talked about the giving of time because I think if you give time you are a leader. If you take time and give time to people, they will respond to that and so I would go out on the floor and talk to people and, and a lot of people felt that well because he came out on the floor, you know, he's really a good guy. Well, there's a lot of times I would walk out on the floor and I'd tell somebody they're full of bologna. You know, I had no problems saying, "Hey, that's not right" or "That's wrong" or "You have to have your safety glasses on", but I always tried to do it tactfully where I wouldn't take away anybody's dignity when I'd do that, but that that's where the action is. That's where…and that's where the knowledge is. You know, um, I would have my staff meetings and I would

sit down with the engineer and the financial guy and the labor guy and all that and, and it's not like I'm a saint or anything, but I always relegalized that at that staff meeting I was the least informed person in that meeting. Everybody else was an expert. Everybody else had more information about their job then I did. They, they were much smarter in their own individual field than I was and so when I'd go onto the floor I would use the same kind of approach. I would know that the guy loading fenders or doing metal finish knew more about it than I did and so I would ask some questions and, and, uh, and people liked to be asked questions. People like you to ask of them what they're doing and so that's when I….and what I'd always… you'd say would I come back with what was remarkable about coming back into the plant…what was remarkable and I'd and this is in retrospect, I would never go and sit in my office as say 'now what did I see today that was really important' but what was really remarkable was how people basically want to do a good job. I don't care where you are. I don't care if you're at McDonald's or if you're at the shoemakers or you're at the barbershop. The barber doesn't give you a except in my case he does a bad job at times, you know, but the barber doesn't sit there and say 'man, I'm going to give this guy a bad haircut', you know, and people don't come into the plant and say, 'man, I'm gonna build bad cars'. Uh-uh, they don't do that. People want to do a good job and there are things that inhibit them from doing a good job and a lot, you know, it could be, it could be things that management causes or it could be things that maybe at home they had a fight with their wife before they came in and they're not in the right mindset or something and when you go out on the floor and you bump around you're able to find these things and talk about them and a lot of times people are just dying to tell you why they can't do a good job. They want to tell you that and here comes the time element. You have got to take time to listen to what they have to say. Don't have to agree with it. Don't have to agree with it, but if you take time to listen to what they have to say you immediately become their leader and you can turn around and 'now listen, I've listened to what you have to say but here's why you're wrong' and they respect you for straightening them out, but that, that was the thing that always amazed me about it as I look back at it. Everybody wants to do a good job. Everybody. Now, you asked me about the differences in some plants. I say everybody, I'm going to say most of the people want to do a good job. Most of the, the vast majority of the people want to do a good job. The difference in the plants in General Motors is the percentage of people who want to do a good job. When you get to some plant, and I'm not gonna name it, but I could walk through that plant today right now and I'll tell you about maybe 40 percent of the people are concerned. You walk through the Lansing plant and I'm gonna say you have, you have 97/98 people in Lansing. Both sides of the town want to do a good job. It's almost like there's a work ethic here. Another thing about the Lansing plant that's significant is that there's a lot of second and third generation in this plant. There are a lot of, you know, I look at the obituaries. I always look at

the obituaries because I gotta know I want to see if I'm going to go see somebody and I hate to look at them. I always hope that I don't see anybody, but you'll see that they worked here for 40 years, 50 years, and their children have worked here and what have you and it's sort of a neat thing, uh, I go to, um, as I go to Meyers, Joe, I can't think of Joe's name, but he's over there, but his son Alex works here. I always talk to Alex and he's talking about his dad and got his…here I talk to his dad everyday, you know, it's just funny how and, and this goes on because people they want their kids to work here. There's always been a pride that existed here and that pride still exists. That, that's a big thing about Lansing. They've, you know, when they took away the Oldsmobile from us I think they destroyed not our pride, but a lot of the heritage we had here. That's a long, long answer to a short question.

Linda Johnson: That's great.

Doug Rademacher: That's a great, that's a great way to put it.

Cheryl McQuaid: Your answer made me want to think…[14:13] I thought of a question that I always wondered about and that was when you went out on the line and worked for a day with Al Pressely, I thought I wonder what he thought about the jobs, doing those jobs and I kind of wondered also, um, how the people, um…

Jim Zubkus: [14:29] Do you remember that Cheryl?

Cheryl McQuaid: Yes, I do.

Jim Zubkus: You know how that.

Cheryl McQuaid: I was very proud of you.

Jim Zubkus: [14:32] Do you know how that came about?

Cheryl McQuaid: No, I don't.

Jim Zubkus: Aw, God, very few people remember this. We had the United Way and I raffled myself off. I raffled myself off and everybody who gave a fair share in the body shop their name went in a hat and when they pulled the name out I was going to work on their job and then, and I did it in the body shop, the trim shop, plant engineering, the whole…each department.

Linda Johnson: You worked all day. You and Al.

Doug Rademacher: I'm going to tell you something.

Linda Johnson: Both shifts.

Jim Zubkus: I'm going to tell you something, the worse thing is I can't remember the foreman's name from plant engineering, but he put me on a jackhammer and I was able to do the jackhammer job okay, but after I got back in my office I said, "Holy smokes", but I wouldn't let them know I was tired and then, [15:22] Cheryl, you were in trim weren't you?

Cheryl McQuaid: Yes I was.

Jim Zubkus: You were in trim. [15:25] You know the door paper job?

Cheryl McQuaid: Yeah.

Jim Zubkus: Well, I was on the door paper job.

Cheryl McQuiad: Oh my.

Jim Zubkus: That's the job I had. Well, you know, that first of all you're gonna feel dumb, you know, and they'll just love you not to be able to do their job. You know? They just love you not being able to do their job. You know? Not in a nasty way, but, you know, they just get an enjoyment out of it. Oh yeah. Like pulling a joke on somebody. Like on this door paper job and I can't do the damn job. You know, I go to put the paper on and I couldn't get it. Well, they turned the fan on.

[laughter]

Jim Zubkus: See, they turned the fan and then you don't pick up on it, you know, so I'm going and then after about 20 minutes I just "turn that fan off right there" and they just cracked up. The whole place looked at me and said, "Man, it took you a long time to find that out", you know, but, um, to answer your question, um, it always amazed me at how when you walk down a line and watch a job it looks so easy. It looks so easy, but when you get on to it you have to find out that there are so many little techniques and talents that have got to come about that, um, it's an art. It's an art and that is truly why absenteeism…you know, every time I give a quarterly meeting I'd always talk about absenteeism because you're losing, you're losing a genius at this job. You know, if I could take you and put you on the job you could try your butt off, but you're not going to be able to do it as good as that person who is on it every day. Absenteeism killed us. It kills everything. I mean not only our place, but I mean it could happen at the barbershop and there is an absentee barber in there. You know, you're not going to get the same haircut. I think I always get an absentee guy that gives me one, but, um I, I was, I knew that it is skilled, but I never had the appreciation until I went

out and tried it myself. Um, I gotta tell you…[17:20] am I boring you with this stuff?

Cheryl McQuaid: No.

Linda Johnson: No.

Doug Rademacher: No.

John Fedewa: No, not at all.

Jim Zubkus: I was in Arlington and back then we had to solder joints that you did on a rear quarter and soldering is an actual art. It was a body shop art that you had to get that solder at just a certain temperature because it would flow. If you got it too hot, it would turn into water and if you got it too cold, it wouldn't adhere, but anyway we were getting all of these defects and all the defects in the cars so I'd go out and I said, "Now you guys I just can't believe this job is that hard to do. I can't believe solder is that hard. It doesn't look that hard." So they said, "oh, it's hard." So anyway Saturday I come in with my, my guard, my sneaks and my jeans and my shirt and my lunch and I'm going on a soldering job. They're going to teach me how to do it and I said, "Well, here's what I want you to do now? I'm going to get on this job and I want you to put an extra repairman down there 'cuz you're gonna get repair because I don't know how to do this, but I'm gonna learn it." This solder is molten steel is what it is. Well, I'm trying to put the stuff on and I go 'sniff, sniff' and I can smell this rubber burning. My sneaker was on fire.

[laughter]

Jim Zubkus: And they cracked up, you know? I never did learn how to do the soldering. It would have taken me a month to learn how to do that, but there are skills. There are skills, um, for people to do the job. I, I think that we as a management team do a bad job of assigning the right person for the right job. You don't assign a short person to do a job here. You don't assign a tall person to do a job here. You don't assign a little person to do some weight…where there is weight involved. We don't do a good job of lining up our workforce to do the job at hand from an ergonomic standpoint, but the jobs take talent. The jobs take a lot of skill. The jobs and, uh, quite frankly, I think people don't realize, uh, how hard they are because when they go through the plant they see these jobs These people are so skilled at it that they make it look easy. It's like a guy that does card tricks. He looks, you know, just take you how long to learn it, how to do a card trick, but they do it so much they become adept at it. So Cheryl to answer your question, the jobs are complex and they take, uh, and you're gonna have to be ambidextrous and you have to be intelligent. You have got to know what

the schedule calls for, which is another thing. The schedules on a car. This car calls for this item and this car calls for that item and so you've got to know how to read the schedule and, um, and if you get behind for some reason you have a tough time keeping up because the jobs are set to be, you know, you're loaded. The job is loaded, hopefully not unfairly, but the jobs are full so that you're efficient and you can't, you can't afford to miss a miss movement or you're in the hole and then you're fighting your way back so it's tough. It's tough work. It, it's worth every dollar you get paid.

Doug Rademacher: Let's talk about your…the environment overall. [20:22] How were things for you when you went into the holidays say Thanksgiving and Christmas and your staff? How did that work out for you?

Jim Zubkus: You mean as how did we…

Doug Rademacher: [20:37] Wha, what types of things did you all do around that time of year?

Jim Zubkus: Oh, that, that…

Doug Rademacher: As a group.

Jim Zubkus: A, uh, I had a, um, uh, every Christmas, um, the staff would have a staff Christmas party and it was paid for by General Motors and, ah, your wives would be involved. We would always have the wives involved and, um, we'd always have a nice present for them, nothing elaborate, but something that they and something that was sort of, uh personal, you know, that, that would, you know, it was always for the women, you know, it wasn't for us, and we'd have a good time just being together and sharing, sharing the Christmas spirit. Another thing that we did, eh, not necessarily on the holidays, but I don't know if you recall but General Motors used to give out pins for seniority. They'd give out like a rube for 25 years and this and for some reason, I would assume cost reasons, they canceled that and so we started, uh, in with our salaried people and incidentally I tried to get the Union to do this with me and they didn't for some reason did not want to do it, did not want to do it, but, um, and so I didn't question it, but we still did it for salaried, um, incidentally, almost everything I did for salaried I tried to do for the bargaining unit too because they were just as important to me as my salaried people were, um, and this was a neat thing. If you had 30 years experience up until the first time we did it everybody who had gathered 30 years in seniority we had a luncheon, a dinner for them upstairs. You used to come and take pictures. We'd have a dinner for them and it was a first-class dinner. I mean it was first-class. I mean it was the best steak, the best desserts, I mean it was a knock out and they brought their wives or their husbands or their significant other. They were part of it and we had and we would have this and this was for everybody who acquired 30 years up until this day, and during that after we had the dinner and before dessert we

would go around and each participate who had 30 years their supervisor would stand up, put his or her hand on their shoulder, and talk about their achievements in 30 years. Now you could hear the buttons flying through the room because your wife is standing next to you or something like that or your husband is sitting next to you, they felt proud that we recognized their 30 years and then afterwards, after we go the first slew out of the way, then every year thereafter those who accrued 30 years during that year we just went on and on and on and we did it for about 4 years. In fact, it come back twice. It was such a success. I'd come back to the Union again and say, "this is really successful and we go do this at a big shindig like at the Sheraton or something like that and do it" and I, I don't know why our Union was, both Unions, I don't know…our Union said "we're always participative with you". You know, we'd talk about that and for some reason they didn't want to do that, but that's another thing we did to build up the team. Then, I, I did something else that, um, this has nothing to do with holidays or something but you talked about how I built the team up, um, I wasn't a nice guy all the time. You had to make your goals. You had to make, you had to keep us profitable so we could stay in business. You've got to make money to stay in business and if it means being the nice guy you're not going to make money, then you've got to change a little bit because you have got to stay in business. I would never dress down somebody in my staff meeting. Never, but I'll tell you what, we had some knockdown, drag outs just me and that individual, but no one else knew about it and it's like Lee Iacocca said, which is really important, Lee Iacocca said, "if you're going to praise somebody, do it in a crowd. If you're going to degregate somebody, do it on the telephone." And that, that's true and that's what really makes the team because when you can take somebody down and tell them 'here's where you're not doing your job, you're incompetent and you're hurting us' or something like that and you do it just them and you all they do is gain respect for you because you're telling them the truth and you're probably telling them something that they already know anyway. So those are the kinds of things that I used to build up the team, but the holidays were always special for me and then we had the…I'd write the thing the letter for the line times to the people. Yeah. I'd write about going home to Pittsburgh to my mom's house and how important that was during Thanksgiving. I don't know if you're, uh, you talk about building the team up, um, there were 2 twins in the body shop that…[25:28] do you know the 2 twins I'm talking about in the body shop? They were identical and…

John Fedewa: [25:33] What colors did they wear?

Jim Zubkus: They were, they were big Notre Dame fans, alright. So you know coming from Pittsburgh, which is base…Pittsburgh is just loaded with ethinic. It's all ethnic groups. There's Italians. There's Lithuanian's, There's Polish. There's the Black people. There's the Hungarians. You know, and they all

have their own little communities. Everybody has their own church and their own bars. They all have their own bars too. Anyway, my mom was a big Notre Dame fan. You know, being Catholic she's a Notre Dame and she wanted me to go to Notre Dame real bad. In fact, I had a chance to go to Notre Dame but didn't do it, but anyway, out on the floor I'm talking to these guys about they're talking about Notre Dame and they said, you know, and I'm talking about Notre Dame and they said, uh, told them about how big of a fan my mom was and they said, [26:19] "Well, is she Catholic?" And I said, "Yeah, she's Catholic and loves Notre Dame." Well, they were both Catholic, very good Catholics, practicing Catholics, and they went to Rome. They went to Rome with their families on a vacation and when they come back from Rome they brought a rosary, now I don't know if you know what a rosary is but it's like a string of beads that you pray on and it's sort of old fashion stuff, so they said it was blessed by the Pope. You know, some vendor on the corner is probably 'yeah, they were blessed by the Pope', but my mom didn't know the difference, you know, so I took it home to my mom and she said, "Jim, when you go back I want you to go out and hug those guys. I want you to hug them." And, uh, when your mom tells you to do something you better do it if your mom tells you to do it. So, um, I told you Linda.

Linda Johnson: Yeah.

Jim Zubkus: Didn't I and I said, "Come on up, we're going to take a picture." So I went out and I hugged these guys. I actually hugged them. Now, I don't mean just, you know…

Linda Johnson: I got the picture.

Jim Zubkus: I mean, I hug them and I actually transferred my mom's love and appreciation through my body to theirs and it felt good. It, it felt, you know, and it wasn't out of the ordinary. It wasn't phony, but it was given time. It was taking time to walk out of your office and give these guys a hug. It was the greatest thing going so what started in the plant [inaudible 27:32] "I haven't been absent in a week. [27:36] How about a hug?" And I'd say, "Nah, it doesn't deserve it." You know? It started to be like a funny deal, but those are the kinds of things that spending time. You spend time with your organization. That's a…you know, I worked in General Motors for, um, 40 years and there's 2 things I was never absent 1 day in 40 years and every time I had a plant I never went home without going into my plant somewhere, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, an hour somewhere. I'd always go out in the plant. They'd always see me in the plant. It was sort of like a…it became like a thing for me. Of course, never missing a day of work I got a lot of people sick because I came in with the flu a lot of times.

[laughter]

Jim Zubkus: [28:18] What else?

Doug Rademacher: Good times and bad times as far as staff is concerned. [28:24] Any particular staff member that stood out more than the others as outstanding and one that may have been one that you had to nurture more?

Jim Zubkus: Well, the first time we won the J.D. Power Award was absolutely a big, big thing for me, and then I don't know of you know that, um, because of the plant, not because of me but because of the plant and the people, I received the Society of Quality Engineer Man of the Year Award. It's a uni…that's a nat, Europe, Germany, every out… and we received it for our plant. Those are a couple outstanding moments. The only thing that bothered me was, you know, the only strike that we ever had at Lansing I was the plant manager. I don't know if you remember that, and that was a strike we had over mass relief.

Linda Johnson: [29:14] Is that was on, mass relief? How long was that strike?

Jim Zubkus: Uh, one day. Started on Friday and ended on Monday. Broke my heart. It just broke my heart, simply because I thought what I was doing was right and the bargaining unit thought what they were doing was right, you know, but it was really neat. You talk about what's neat about Lansing. It was amazing but over the weekend we resolved our differences and, uh, they said and the way we resolved it really was and Gary Bernath was President and, um, he said, "If you hold off, if you cancel this right now and hold off until the next contract, we will put it in the next contract." And I said, "It's a deal. It's a deal." [29:58] You know why? Mess around for 10 months or a year or however long it was, why, you know, why break relationships and friendships for it and so we did it and next year, bingo there it was and look at it the place just went crazy, went good. That, that was broke my heart really. I was just…I was depressed. I thought 'Golly' because that was the only strike that I was plant manager of.

Linda Johnson: [30:23] Where there any programs that were ever initiated during the time that you were here that you really liked a lot as far as making a difference in the plant?

Jim Zubkus: There have been so many programs that would come up. Numerous programs that we never really saw to its entirety. They'd always change the program somewhere along the line or change the goal or change the direction and there would be another program come up so they'd really start to lose their emphasis. They started to lose their, you know, importance. They'd say, 'okay, here's another program that's coming up', you know, and hell we're working on this one right here. [31:05] Why don't we continue…the only program that came up and stayed and prospered and did

well was the Substance Abuse Program. We put people on the Substance Abuse Program because I'm going to say safety is a given. Safety was a given. I never considered that as a program. I considered that as a mandate. You know, that wasn't a program. We had police there so as, but substance abuse put the right people on there and they probably did a tremendous job, every place I'd been, on helping so many people that we don't know anything about and don't care to know about, but it was, it was really, really a great program. Um, QWL, um, QWL was just you could call it a program. I'd call it a way of management but both Union and Management. It's a way of treating your people. It's, uh, merely giving time to your people. Having them treat you as you wanted…treat them as you wanted to be treated so it's really not a program, it was just really do what you're supposed to do, but that stuck around for a long time.

Doug Rademacher: [32:16] Would that be Quality of Work Life?

Jim Zubkus: Yeah, Quality of Work Life. Yeah.

Doug Rademacher: For those that are listening that don't know.

Jim Zubkus: Yeah, it's Quality of Work Life. Yeah. It…some of you don't realize it. That started out being called Daisy a Day. It was called Daisy a Day and then it turned into QWL, but, um, I'll tell you what I thought, uh, I started and I thought was pretty neat, um, and I'm not looking for any accolades here but I did the quarterly business thing with the tape for the teams, you know, on where we are with [inaudible 32:49] and absenteeism and double-shifting, and boom, boom, boom and what's important it told people exactly how I felt and, uh, you know if you don't tell the people what's wrong they're not going to be able to help you. It's like going into the doctor's office and he says, 'where do you hurt' and you don't say anything. Well, how's he give you a cure? You've gotta tell him where you're hurting so you can get a cure so I told people exactly where we were hurting and the response, the response was just fantastic and you get it when you walk out on the floor. They'd ask you about the taper, tell you what they thought you were wrong or what have you, so that was a program that, and that hopefully continued. I don't know if Amy continued it or not, but I thought that was important.

Cheryl McQuaid: [33:30] Do you have a day in the plan that stands out better or brighter than any other while you were here? Something that happened or…

Jim Zubkus: I'm going to tell you a story. I, I had, uh, what I considered a pretty darn good open door policy. You could come in and talk to me about anything and incidentally my people when you talk about an open door policy you'd think that people are going to come in and talk about your foreman or their job. Never. They would always come in and talk about divorce, substance

abuse, finance problems. They needed somebody to talk to. They needed somebody to air these things to and I'd sit there and, and listen. Well, one day I was getting ready to go to a meeting and I shot out of my office to go to the meeting and there's a woman standing there and she says, "Mr. Zubkus, I gotta talk to you." And Barbara, I don't know if you remember my secretary Barbara, the Iron Lady, I was afraid of Barbara. She's… [34:36] Is she still here?

Doug Rademacher: Yes.

Jim Zubkus: I love her. She's great, and she said, "He can't talk to you. He's got to go to this meeting. He can't talk to you." But I looked at this lady and something inherent in me said 'there is a problem here' so I told Barbara to go on without me. I'll catch up. Somebody will fill me in and I told this lady to come in and sit down. So she came into my office and she sat down with me and, um, she just stared at me. She didn't say anything and she just stared at me like just looked at me for like I'm going to say 30 seconds. Now 30 seconds does not sound like a long time, but if someone just sits and looks at you for 30 seconds and doesn't say anything you become uncomfortable. So you just… so she finally said, "Mr. Zubkus, Are you area of some of the convenient stores and gas stations that have been robbed? Have you noticed that?" And I said, "No." So she said, "Well, I know who is doing it." And I said, "Okay." She said, "It's my son." And I said, "Okay." and then she stops and she said, "Well, I have a real problem." She said, "I'm a Christian. I know what to do in my heart, but in my whole life he's the only person who's ever loved me." And I said, "Okay." And then she just looked at me for about 20 seconds, just looked at me, and she got up, walked to the door, she turned around and looked at me and she says, "Jim Zubkus, you're my hero. You don't know how much you helped me. I know what to do." And she walked away. Now, if I would have run down to that meeting I possibly could have destroyed that woman's life. I didn't give her one bit of advice. I didn't give her one bit of direction. All I did was took time to listen to her. That's all I did. I just listened to her. It made me feel so good. Incidentally, her husband…she turned this kid in and he is now out. They put him in jail, but he's out now, but it was just so gratifying to me that I had the discipline to stop because I always believed in stopping and listening, stopped and listened to her that I probably changed her life around by doing that and I, I do this talk to different places and I, I tell that story because I tell them it's one of the most significant days in my life and how people in roles of leadership, of committee men or trustees or foreman, how… what an opportunity is for them to change people's lives if they just listen to them because most people know what to do, they just need to bounce. They've gotta…that's why these psychiatrists make all this money. You go lay on a couch and he doesn't do anything. He sits on a couch and you hand him a check. He's just like me, I'm just shaking my head yes, no, yes, yes, no and that I'll never forget that day. In fact, I still

talk about it. In fact, I talk to my kids about it, but that will…that is probably one of the memorable days and, you know, everybody when you want to talk to different people they say, 'well, when's a memorable day for you' and they say, 'well, when we made 5000 cars' or 'when we got 20 percent improvement' or 'when we made x amount of budget years'. Those aren't the important things. The important things are how I as a manager and the people who work for me affected people's lives. That was the important thing. Everything else will fall by itself. You treat those people right, you get those people to believe in you those cars will come all by themselves. The efficiency and quality all just fall right in line. That's after, that's an aftermath. You treat the people right, they'll treat you right because I'm a firm believer. People that walk through that…you know, these people that come in our plant, salaried and hourly, you know, their little league coaches or boy scout leaders or they are in the church programs, their choir leaders. When they walk through that gate with their lunch bucket something changes them if they're bad and I think it's the leadership that changes them. That's what changes their attitude. They can't go from whistling to crying. Something makes that happen and it's leadership and that's what I think is management's job, and so that is probably a unique experience and I'll never forget it. I'll never forget it. Incidentally, that woman still works here.

Doug Rademacher: [39:38] Do you have…what's your, uh, what happened in your work in there that…the worst moment you can remember that you had to experience?

Jim Zubkus: I mentioned the strike.

Doug Rademacher: You did say that.

Jim Zubkus: Yeah, that strike was the worst moment. Yeah. That was the worst thing that ever happened. Then, you know, I don't know if you folks remember, we had several fires. Remember, we had fires up in the paint shop there for a while and we could never find those out and I'd get a call at night, 'hey, the paint shop is on fire.', but you don't realize what that does to you. You know, you worry first 'did anybody get hurt'. The first thing you worry about is did somebody get hurt and then trying to get the plant running and then your embarrassed and that was some of the bad moments. I'll tell you some other bad moments and, um, probably wouldn't be popular for me to say this, but I gotta say it is the Westside neighborhood with these emissions things, I put millions of dollars into incineration. $11 million I put into incineration and those people thought that I was still trying to mess over them and the last thing I want to do…the last thing you want to do is hurt anybody. You know, you're not there to… if I knew and believed that the emissions were toxic going out of that plant, I would've shut that plant down in a minute. My obligation is to, you know, I, you know, because I'd

rather not build cars than hurt somebody, but I would've done that in a second. Boy, you'd go to those meetings and they would just tear you up. I mean, they would just…oh, I just hated going to them, but those were bad moments. Those were bad moments. They hurt us. They cost us a lot of money and we put all this emissions stuff in there that really was not necessary. It was expenditures and all we did was to appease them and those were bad moments right there.

Michael Flemming: Health and safety are always on the list. You spoke of it as very high on your list. We've come a long way with health and safety through UAW General Motors and [41:32] was there ever a time on your watch that we had any fatalities that you can remember?

Jim Zubkus: Can we hear it if it never…no, never had a fatality. I'm just trying to think of, uh, I did have a fatality at Pontiac, but that was years ago, but no, never one here at our plant. We had, we really had a good health and safety organization. It was, of course, a Union management organization and they worked well together and, um, Dick Dickout, what a name.

Cheryl McQuaid: Dave Dickout.

Jim Zubkus: Dave Dickout. I said, "You've gotta change your last name", but I see him all the time and, uh, and, uh, he was, you know, the thing that I like about our safety department was they had, they had an attribute that is not very common. They had common sense. They had common sense. They, they would not ask for the sky and by the same time would make it safe. You know, they were good, especially Joe from the body shop. Remember Joe, the little Mexican fellow, Joe and, um, uh, boy we had…I'm trying to think of the other guy who was really good. Um, boy we had some good ones though. We had, we had good, good safety…

Linda Johnson: Robin Voucher…

Jim Zubkus: [43:03] Who?

Linda Johnson: Robin Voucher and I'm trying to remember Joe's…

John Fedewa: Lynn Marifield.

Michael Flemming: Joe Perez.

Cheryl McQuaid: [inaudible 43:11]

Jim Zubkus: [43:12] Who?

Cheryl McQuaid: Don Rathbaum.

Jim Zubkus: Don Rathbaum.

Linda Johnson: He was the trim…

Cheryl McQuaid: He was the trim safety guy.

Jim Zubkus: Yeah, yeah. We had good people. We had good people. You know, people can tell you something is unsafe, but you're a fool not to fix it. I mean, you've gotta fix it. You've gotta do it and they'd bring stuff to me that was necessary to be done. Sometimes you'd be embarrassed by them bringing it to you. Holy smokes I didn't even recognize this, but I never had a fatality. Never.

John Fedewa: [43:39] Did you know of a there's different groups in the plant that might, uh, the met regularly like a Bible study or people that played music? Did you ever participate or attend any of that stuff while you were…

Jim Zubkus: No. No, I, I attended a lot of team meetings. I'd stop in to team meetings, but, um, first of all the answer to you is no. I never, except I would go to the meetings that pertained to the business. You know, like, uh, preventive maintenance meetings. I'd always make myself available there, but you never knew where those meetings were. You know, the Bible meetings or stuff like that. I, I did not attend them.

John Fedewa: Okay.

Linda Johnson: In our plant we sometimes had vendors, people that sold their hot dogs or their burritos or their coffee or their candy. [44:35] How did you feel about that?

Jim Zubkus: I didn't like it because, um, if you have time to sell burritos and candy and all that, then you have time to do work. Okay, and, and, um, that was like an infringement on work time so I didn't like it. That was one reason I didn't like it. Second reason I didn't like it is, especially the hot foods and I remember the taco guy and all that, and there is a chance for that food to be tainted, you know, because you can't keep it refrigerated or warm or whatever it is supposed to be in a plant so there is a chance for it to go bad. That's the second reason. Third reason is, and this is strictly numbers that they'd give me, for every cup of coffee or whatever we sold in the plant, we infringed on the income of the cafeteria upstairs so they couldn't provide better service to us. Now that was their story, okay, and I didn't know the price so I never got into that, but that was their story. That was another reason because I wanted the cafeteria to be a nice cafeteria for us. In fact, we remodeled it if you recall. That is the negative end of the business. The positive end of the business about the coffee, coffee is sort of like an

American tradition. You know what I mean, like the British have their tea in the afternoon, you know, tea and crumpets, coffee is sort of like an…and to have to go to the machine to get coffee, which was really bad coffee alright. Terrible, it's watered down. It wasn't worth a penny, but these guys would make coffee in various areas of the plant, which was neat. Another thing I liked about coffee is that I like going to get a cup of coffee with the folks and sitting there and I'd drink a cup of coffee. In fact, I'd bet them coffee on the games. You know, I'd bet on…hey I'd bet you coffee on this and something like that so it was a social thing for me. I liked the coffee end of the business. The hot food, the tacos, the burritos, and what not I did not like it for the reasons I told you, but if a person could run around with his deal selling tacos, he should be working and I'd tell them that all the time and I was a straight one. I'd say, "If I catch you doing this, you're going to…I'm going to tell your boss. You're going to hit the road for a couple of days." and the guys would say something, something and I'd say, "A deal's a deal." Okay, I want to go back just a second and tell you about a day that really pleased me in that you asked about. We had General Motors called us and said we're going to give you $25,000 to do whatever you want to do with in the plant. Buy pizzas or, and I want to talk to you about pizzas too. I want to tell you about giving pizza…is this going too long?

Doug Rademacher: No sir.

Michael Flemming: As a matter of fact, why don't we just take a break.

Cheryl McQuaid: No, he has…

Michael Flemming: Just for one second.

Jim Zubkus: We'd drive and I'm driving about 40 mph and an old fella drives right into me head first, head-on collision. They thought my wife was going to die and they thought my son was going to die. In fact, we had the priest in to give him the Last Rites.

Linda Johnson: [47:33] How old was he?

Jim Zubkus: He was about 10.

Linda Johnson: So you guys were…okay.

Jim Zubkus: And it was….Bessie was incapacitated for I mean she couldn't do anything. I mean she couldn't go to the bathroom, uh, she would have her period and had to be taken care of, she couldn't…both of her wrists were broken so she couldn't use those. She had broken bones. She still limps bad in the morning when she gets up, but it was, it was the scariest time of my life.

That was a head-on accident. Yeah, got through that and what was really funny is, uh, I, I left the metal plant. I left as manager of the metal plant to go on this team, this design team, to go on the design team but when I was in the metal plant engineering would come in and say, "Jim, we want you to put a dart" it's called a dart and it's metal which means you've got to go in and make a dye change and then take a little chunk of metal out so that the car would collapse better and I would always resist it. I would say, "This is a bunch of baloney. You know you engineers are splitting hairs, blah, blah, blah". Well, when we had that accident the car, if you can imagine this, there was such a terrible head-on crash that the rear axle buckled. The roof buckled. The hood buckled. The doors, everything, the floor pan buckled, but everything buckled because the car was designed, as it is today, for all the inertia of the crash to go around the passengers. So, if you're buckled you really have room to live. You're going to get beat up, but all of the inertia, the forces go around you and so you live and so I never, never, ever resisted another engineering change from there on. In fact, I went to Downtown to the board meeting and talked about engineering changes, about how important they are to the product, but I thought I was going to lose my family. That was scary.

Linda Johnson: [49:26] And you said you were driving the prototype for what vehicle?

Jim Zubkus: The Grand Am.

Linda Johnson: Grand Am.

Cheryl McQuaid: The Grand Am. Wow.

Jim Zubkus: Which we build here, which was a very successful vehicle for us. You asked about and I'm going to tell you about…[49:41] did you click me back on? About a great time in the plant. A time that I really felt good. Well, GM said we have $25,000, they gave each plant manager $25,000 to do whatever he wanted to do with it. Well, you could not throw a party for the bargaining unit because there is not enough money. You couldn't through a bargaining party for the salaried people because people would get mad at you and say, 'hey, you're only doing it for one entity'. So, we said let's do this and let's do that and quite honestly it was my idea. I said, "Wait a minute. Let's do something that everybody can get involved in and we're all going to give it to one person. We will give the whole $25,000 to one person, but they have to use it for a scholarship program for their children." [50:27] Do you remember that?

John Fedewa: Yes, yes.

Jim Zubkus: Well, we get together. We've got Mayor Hollister and we've got everybody there, Burton Nath, and we're all in there, Art Baker, and we're all in my

office and so we pull the name out of the hat and we said and I can't remember the name, but anyway we run over and we have, of course we have a roster. Every employee at General Mo…at Lansing, you know, every badge number every position, and we can't find this guy in the plant. We're looking all over and we can't find him. Well, he happened to be on the third shift. He's a third shift skilled trades guy and he's at home sleeping. So, we said ah poop, you know, doggone it, well the guy's at, [51:09] where you in there Lin…

Linda Johnson: Yeah, I was in there.

Jim Zubkus: So, well we get the name and we said, "Well, we'll call him at home." Se we call him at home and he picks up and I said, "Hi" whatever your name is, and I said, "This is Jim Zubkus and I am here with Mayor Hollister" and he says, "That's a bunch of bullshit. Who is this?" And we've got him on the speaker phone and I said, "This is Jim Zubkus" and he said, "No it isn't" and I said, "Yes it is and you won, you won this scholarship." He said, "I can't believe it" and I said, "Yeah." So Hollister and I get in the car. [51:41] Did you come with us Lin?

Linda Johnson: Yes.

Jim Zubkus: Drove out to his house. We drove out to his house and we, we presented the scholarship to him. Well, it so happens he has twins, two twins and he was down and out. Something happened where he had a huge debt or something like that and his two twins were graduating from school, high school, that year, ironically, he was going to be able to send them to school so he went 1 to Central and 1 to Lansing Community College and what a great thing that was, but the greatest thing was I got a call from 1 of the twins who graduated and was going on for her Master's Degree call me at home and say, "I want to thank you for that, for that deal", but it was, you know, you talk about a neat thing to do for people. That was a great, that was a great idea. Okay, now secondly thing I want to tell you about is pizzas.

Michael Flemming: Okay.

Jim Zubkus: So many times in, in every plant I've been in people would say, 'Boy, I'm going to buy pizzas for my crew because they did a good job" and that would bother me so much because pizza has been…do you think somebody goes home at night and sits down with their family at the table and says 'guess what, we had pizza', they don't care about that.

[laughter]

Jim Zubkus: I said, if you really want to show people that you appreciate their efforts get off your duff and walk out, take time…there's that word again 'time'.

There's the leadership thing. Take time to walk out into that plant, shake the person's hand, and put your hand on their shoulder and say, "You mean a lot to me. You did me a heck of a job." I guarantee you they're going home at night and sit down with their family and say, "Hey, the leadership came up and said to me I did a good job for them. It really made me feel good." Anybody can buy pizza. All you've gotta do is get on the phone and call Dominos and they'll be right out there with their pizzas, you know, and it's the same thing you can get at home that night if you want, you can call Dominos, but you can't get that person to come out and congratulate you and give you the feelings that, you know, give them that hug. That's what they need, so that's that answer to that question.

Michael Flemming: [53:37] Do you ever think that there will ever be a team assembled the way that it was when you and the Blue Ribbon Committee and David Hollister was involved in that, do you think the relationship with Hollister, yourself, and the others that were involved, do you think you'll ever see anything that dynamic again?

Jim Zubkus: Sure do. I sure do because necessity will make that happen. Uh, we knew that we weren't going to get money for a new paint shop here and, um, our only alternative was we were going to go down the tubes without anything or we were going to have to band together and work together to get new plants, which we were successful as you can see the one over here at Grand River and, of course, the one going out at Delta Township. Yeah, and if some place comes up like that and you can get management, it's a three-legged stool; it's management, union, and community. You've gotta have those three legs on a stool. If one of the legs aren't on that stool, it's not going to fly. That stool is going to fall over. So, we had the necessity. We knew what we had to do. Frankly, uh, I have to give credit to Hollister. He was just, just in our corner. He fought for us like crazy and the governor at that time was, who the heck was the governor before…

Doug Rademacher: Big John.

Jim Zubkus: Huh?

Doug Rademacher: John Engler.

Jim Zubkus: Yeah, he really helped too. He really helped, and of course they convinced GM Downtown and, and people, uh, what we did is we sold, we sold the efforts of the workforce. You talked about history, you know, you want to know something about history… the workforce, the workforce and the relationship between union and management here made it a viable, a viable investment for General Motors. You know, they're not going to invest billions of dollars into someplace where you're fighting among yourselves and the work is shoddy. It's a tribute to the people. All of them.

Management, hourly, union, everybody, the community, that the business came here because they're not going…you're not going to invest, you're not going to put your money into a savings account of a bank that is doing shoddy business and falling apart. You're only going to put it where you think you're going to reap benefit, and quite frankly the efforts of the people and the results of the people were what made it come here. Nothing else. They could've gone where it was warm. You know, that's the trend to go down to the heat belt, you know, down to the sunbelt, come right here to Lansing and it's, there is a different work ethic in this community. There is definitely a different work ethic in this community.

Cheryl McQuaid: We were talking earlier about the amount of time that managers work and things like that. [56:18] Can you tell us about some of the hours that you used to work as a manager?

Jim Zubkus: Sure. I probably worked let's say my last 10 years, uh, average, 12 hours a day. Average. Now that's every day 8-hour shift plus half of another one. That's almost like double-shift, which I'd hate because you take time away from your family to do it, but of course my children were gone then. See, my children were gone so I was able to do that and in good faith. Prior to that, I would say like when I was a foreman and a general foreman when I was on the night shift when I was on repair, I was working 16 hours a day and I was working 16 hours a day because, you know, when I got out of college I didn't have anything. I had nothing, and I wanted the overtime. I wanted the overtime. Quite frankly, you know time and a half back then, double-time on Sundays. I was getting paid and I was working 7 days a week, 16 hours a day. If I had to do it over, if I had to do it over, I would go back and go to those little league games that I missed, those teacher conferences that I missed, the missing walk-ins to the school and seeing my kids paintings up on the school hanging on the wall like I see right now with my grandchildren. I would do it over. It took a big chunk out of my life and, uh, the people and, you know, I brought that…I always, I was always against double-shift. My contention on double-shift is it's the worst thing that could happen to a plant. First of all, your people aren't safe and secondly they're probably building a shoddy job because they're tired, 16 hours of beating a line, and they're missing the greatest thing in the world… their leisure time and their family. They're missing it and my contention as a manager I always said 'look if we have to double-shift there's two things that are wrong. If we don't have enough people to run this plant, go hire them. You get enough people in to man this job. If we've got enough people and they're not showing up, bang them in the fanny and get them in here because they have a responsibility to the job.' But, I'd go back and Cheryl I would in a minute change those hours that I spent to spend time with my family. That's the most important thing in your life. The most important thing in your life.

Doug Rademacher: Absolutely.

Jim Zubkus: So, uh, and I away too many…but towards the end I was spending a good 12/15 hours, especially when we started to negotiate for this new plant. I did a lot of things that people didn't know. I couldn't let them know. I'd be with the governor, I'd be with Hollister, we'd spend hours in secret meetings so that people wouldn't know we were doing it because you didn't want to build up hopes and, of course, you don't want anybody else to know that you have a chance to get a new plant because as soon as some other manager, you know, some manager at Lordstown or Terrytown who is losing his plant, he's coming right after me. He's going to say, 'Hey, I'm going…here's my plan to do this." He's just got to be competitive for you. So you're trying to keep everything a secret, you know, and a lot of hours, but great results.

John Fedewa: Great results.

Michael Flemming: You worked at a number of different plants. [59:39] Can you share what it was like in Lansing as far as women working for you and ethics? Was the Blacks and Hispanics, was there more women and minorities employed in Lansing over different…

Jim Zubkus: No. I had more minorities in Pontiac, Blacks, Afro-Americans in Pontiac than I did here at Lansing and in Arlington by far, by far more minorities because of the Mexican/Hispanic because that's a very big Hispanic area and a lot of them came from San Antonio north to the Dallas/Ft. Worth area where Arlington is located so I probably, my workforce in Arlington was at least, at least 50 percent Hispanic and maybe and where I was population wise there was very few Black people in my area of Arlin…I maybe had 5 percent Black people in, in, uh, in Texas and here in Lansing we have a pretty much, if you look at the demographics, minorities, women and then you break your minorities down by Indian, Hispanic, and Black people there percentages are pretty much the population of the area. Pretty doggone fair. Where there is a discrepancy is in the management positions. I had virtually no minorities in Texas. The, uh, I had maybe one or 2 Hispanics in my workgroup and, uh, probably 10 Black people in, in, uh, Lansing, uh, we're a little bit under. I mean we were not quite as many as we need, especially not Blacks but women. A little bit, uh, need more women in management positions, and I like women in management positions and I'll tell you why. Women are more detailed than men. You know, we're sloppy. I get toast crumbs all over the place and coffee spilled here, you know, Bessie is running around, you know, mopping up after me all the time, but they are much more detailed. They're aware of detail more than men are and they would see the little things that were really important so they're and you have to give them all a chance if you're capable. I, first of all, I don't believe in

tokens. I don't want to give anybody a job if they don't deserve it, but if they do deserve it they better get it.

Michael Flemming: That's the way I look at it.

Cheryl McQuaid: You talked a little bit about your family and [62:27] can you talk a little bit about your work family and the people the comradery and the people that you've met through your work and how they have affected your life?

Jim Zubkus: Well, here, this is part of the family right here, you know, this is part of it. The family was…I'll tell you when you really know you have a family. You know, I still my guys still call me believe or not and they'll still talk to me about different things. Ed Grant's back here now. Of course, I've been out to the DelFi plant already. Randy [inaudible 63:00] wanted to show me some things out here so I went out with him. You know, he was my assistant plant manager. Part of the family is promote them. I had a lot of guys I promoted through my time that have advanced and that makes you feel good. It's like one of your own kids going to school and graduating and all that so you feel good about that, so that's part of your family and they call me and they stay in touch with me. The biggest thing is seeing the bargaining unit people as part of my family. When I bump into them at Meyer's or I bump into them at K-mart or I bump into them and they come over and talk to me. You know, they consider me one of them and I consider them one of me. That's the neatest part about it, and, uh, since I retired that's great, but I could always rely on the people. I could always, you know it's something that, uh, maybe I created it I don't know, but I can always talk to the people in the plant and get a straight shot. They always give me the straight answer. Sometimes I didn't like what they told me, but they'd tell me what they really felt that they were sincere about their thing and I think that's part of being family. Um, and then, um, I wish we would have, I belong to the Salary Retirement Group or the salary retirement group that I belong to and so I still get to see some of the old codgers, but one of the neatest things, you talk about family, is down in Zephyrhills Pontiac in Zephyrhills, Florida, is the Pontiac Retirement Society and they have bargaining unit people, management, everybody who has been at Pontiac is allowed to be in that retirement group and there are as many management people as there are…and I still go there every year and it's amazing, I told you about starting out as a foreman years ago, the first time I went there and I didn't know it existed the sales group asked me if I would go down and talk to them because every year they have somebody talk to them so I said, "Sure". I went down and lo and behold here comes Virgil Crux, who was my first utility man, and he came and he said, "I haven't been to one of these meetings, but I understood that you were here and I came to see because you were my favorite foreman." I'll never forget that. It just, you talk about family, well, I went down there to give this talk and I had scheduled it and I had the secretary schedule me in. I got in that morning

and was going to turn right around and fly out that evening so I had about, after the talk, about a 2-hour…well, we got to talking about old times down there and I said to the guy, "Where is the closest beer store?" and I sent out and brought in a keg of beer, called the secretary and said change my flight I won't be home 'til tomorrow morning, and I sat there talked to those folks, drinking beer with them and that's what family is all about, you know, and those bargaining unit people and management people are great, and it's the same thing here. I'll go, I'll stop around, I'll stop at the Irish Pub every now and then just to see if I bump into anybody, you know, and I've never been to Harry's and I always say I'm really going to go to Harry's one of these days just to walk in there, I never went into Harry's, but it's because you share so much. It's because you share so much time with them. You share grief, you share the good times, the quality, you share the down time with them, and you automatically become family with them, you know, so they're, they're my buds.

Cheryl McQuad: Now, you were here during the changes in the, um, from Fisher Body to the BOC. [66:37] Where you…

Jim Zubkus: No. That was Frank Shodder. Frank was here then. He made that change. When I came in it was all Lansing Car [inaudible 66:46]. It was done. Frank did that. It was a hard job and he did a wonderful job at it.

Cheryl McQuaid: [66:53] You retired when?

Jim Zubkus: Uh, 2000.

Cheryl McQuad: 2000. Okay, [67:00] can you tell us about your last few days at the plant and how you felt about the plant and your retirement?

Jim Zubkus: Well, yeah. It, uh, I didn't want to leave. It's like you finally make this decision to go and then you wish you could change it around, you know, you want to change it around because I knew I was going to miss the people. I knew I was going to miss the hubbub. You know, you, you never realize how much pressure is on you until you leave and pressure is part of the job. It's part of the job. There's always somebody with a complaint. There's always somebody with a kind of a problem going on and I knew, I was aware that I'd miss that and I had misgivings about retiring. As a matter of fact, probably my first six months I really went into depression. I became depressed. I mean, not that I had to see a, you know, seek medical attention but I was down on myself. I felt like I wasn't contributing anymore, that I was getting old and it really bothered me and that started probably a week before, especially when you know someone is going to take your place and when, when you become a lame duck, you become a lame duck all of the sudden you lose you pizazz, your value. You know, you're impetus. You lose it because this person's waiting to take your place. You know, you're

not the man anymore. You know, and it, it, boy I tell you it rips the soul right out of you, but we all go through that in life.

John Fedewa: And that's not knowing Frank's feeling, but, uh, [68:39] when you were here to take Frank Shotter's place did you think every think back that maybe he was feeling just what you just said you felt?

Jim Zubkus: Oh yeah. Well, you know, Frank, Frank, uh, was going to be a vice president and, uh, he really, he really got shafted. Frank got shafted because he was a fantastic candidate for, uh, and it's funny how you know your own…you committee man and shop committee man, you know the guy, you know your group, you know who's good and who isn't, you know, and the managers all knew Frank and we knew he was the best. He was absolutely the best and, um, quite frankly I was worried about replacing him because he was so good. You know, step in to try to cover for a guy like that, and he got shafted, but when we had…[69:29] I'm not boring you and I with this?

Cheryl McQuaid: Not at all.

Jim Zubkus: Okay, because I carry all of these little stories, you know, that you don't hear about. Frank said, "You", when I came I came two weeks early. He says, "Okay, you take over the office" and I said, "Absolutely not." I said, "As long as you're here, this is your office. Okay?" Because he made himself a little office down the hall because he couldn't retire for two weeks because of the date. I said, "No way." I said, "Your right in this office. You're still the man. Until you walk out, you're the man." He said, "Well, we'll share this office together." So I said, "Alright, we'll share this office together." Well, every now and then Doug Tracey, who was our boss and Doug was just a nasty soul, and he's always ask all these questions that he knew the answer to. You know, he knew the answer already but he'd call, you know, so he'd call and, of course, out of respect for Frank instead of me getting on the phone like being I'm the manager now and you sit there like a lump on a log, I would flip on the speaker so Frank, so Doug would say, "Well, how about this" and Frank would say, "Zub, don't pay any attention to this jerk. He's going to ask you.." and I'm trying to shut the speaker phone off and I'd say, "Frank, you're leaving and I'm staying" and he'd go, "Nah, don't pay any attention to him. He's going to ask you these goofy questions." So, but he made me feel at home. He took me around, he took me around to every group and introduced me to every group and brought me to the union hall and all that, and I tried to do that with Amy, but she didn't want to do that, but I thought that was the neatest deal for him to take me around and, you know, make me feel at home and what's neat is it makes the transition because they all respected Frank and if Frank shows that he respects you, then people automatically will sort of get on your band…sort of support you because if Frank supported you and they supported Frank they'll support you too, but he treated me great. He was great. He was in

his last two weeks and I am definitely against drinking in a plant. I just I, I think that's the worst thing you can do is drink in a plant. Well, he says, "Come on, we're going out to lunch" and we'd go out to lunch and he'd go take me over to the Lansing Country Club and he'd put down two Manhattan's, you know, he'd just boom, boom and those are like powerful drinks and I wouldn't drink. I wouldn't drink, not that I won't drink afterwards, but during work hours I won't drink, and he'd put two of those things and he'd be half blitzed and then he say, "I'm going to down to this office and sit for a while" and I'd go down and I'd here (snoring noises). I'd be shutting the door. God Almighty. I'd close the door so no one would see Frank in there. Uh, it was a riot.

Doug Rademacher: Jim, I do want to tell you that I've worked in the Fisher Body plant for 27 years and I've had four different plant managers and I want you to know that you, uh, you may coming into work a rewarding experience for me, um, you know, I had a job to do and I came in, but it was a pleasure to work for you.

Jim Zubkus: Oh, thank you.

Doug Rademacher: To work in a plant because you did, you came out and saw the people and I wanted you to know we really respect that because you did…

Jim Zubkus: I appreciate you saying that.

Doug Rademacher: That was, uh, and I told you I spoke to you since you retired and I told you we don't have that feeling. That is not the case anymore and I was able… you had an open door policy and I was able to walk in and I came to you a couple of times.

Jim Zubkus: Oh my gosh.

Doug Rademacher: So, uh, …

Jim Zubkus: I appreciate you saying that Doug. That makes me feel good. It really does.

Michael Flemming: He's absolutely right. You, you did exactly what you spoke of. You spent time with the people and it showed that you were a true leader. Uh, and it echoes in the way that, uh, the community treated you and the city. We happen to have a Jim Zubkus Way and, uh, we're really proud to see that you have a street named after you.

Jim Zubkus: But what a…that is, that is the neatest you bring that up. I didn't want them to do that, um, I didn't want to come up to I came up to City Council and I said, "I don't want you to do this" and my two daughters called me and they

said, “Dad, you got to do that because you’re going to really like that as you get older”, well doggone it their right.

[laughter]

Jim Zubkus: I do. I do. You know, every now and then I’ll drive by and I’ll be in a car with somebody who doesn’t know about that and I’ll say, “Check this out on your right”, you know, but I appreciate that thing, but the people make you what you are, you know, it’s the, the hardest thing to do are the soft parts of the job. It’s easy to do the numbers. It’s easy to do the tooling. You can get people to do tooling for you. There’s all kinds of experts in tooling. Becoming an expert in numbers, they can do the numbers for you. You could get the labor law people. You can get all those people. Those things are basic. The trick to the game is the soft part of the game. To get those people to believe in you, to spend time with the people to take that very, very scarce commodity of time and give it to your people, you know, that’s the trick to leadership is give time so I appreciate you folks having me in here.

Doug Rademacher: It’s been a real pleasure.

Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you.

Linda Johnson: Thank you.

Michael Flemming: We appreciate you.

Jim Zubkus: [74:36] Am I off that…

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