

Tanya Peterson

eighty-one

Hard Working Man

"I've been working twenty-three years steadily for Cleveland Cliffs," Tom Petersen told me. He is currently the assistant general manager of the Empire Mine.

Tom was born on June 1, 1949, in Ishpeming, Michigan. He has a wife, Patricia, and three children. His father's name is Bernhardt Petersen, who began as a mining engineer for Cleveland Cliffs and ended his career as a manager of the Ore Improvement Plant. Tom's mother's name is Phyllis (Anderson) Petersen, and she worked as an LPN at Bell Memorial Hospital. Tom has two brothers and one sister.

Tom attended Michigan Technological University and for two summers he worked at the Empire Mine. After receiving his BS degree in engineering in 1971 Tom went to work full-time at CCI's Research Laboratory where he remained until the fall of 1974. From there he went to work at the Tilden Mine and has been through three plant start-ups. The people who were working at the mine started the Tilden concentrator along with the rest of the mine in 1974. They expanded it and started up another part of the mine. The third start-up was when they transformed the process at the Tilden Mine. "I think in this last start-up we were working 120 hours a week, go home for about six hours and come back and do that for weeks on end. It's pretty hard on the

body, on the minds, and also on the families." Tom stated. In 1984, he was promoted as an operating engineer in the concentrator and in 1988 was promoted a concentrator superintendent at the Tilden Mine. In 1991, he was transferred to the Empire Mine and became the pellet plant superintendent. "I only got to spend a year there and ended up going into a facilitator's job on our total quality effort," he stated. Tom worked as a facilitator for about one year until he was recently promoted to assistant general manager of the Empire Mine, which is his present position.

At the Empire Mine Tom is in charge of the operations and the safety department. He utilizes computers for information, and he does a lot of talking. It has been a high priority to improve the working conditions in the mine. "We wear earplugs for hearing protection, so we don't have any hearing loss." Tom explained. Sometimes when the dust levels are up workers may have to wear respirators. The government motivates the mines to improve safety standards so the mines will be better and safer.

One of the most challenging parts of Tom's job is trying to define the responsibilities of his new position without interfering with the operations of the departments, but at the same time help them out and challenge them to do better. "Lately it has been managing people is to try to get the right people in the right jobs finding out what their talents are and their strong points and get those people in the jobs that can utilize their strengths, watching them perform. There have been times where I've taken some very low performing people in the jobs that are misplaced in the work they are doing and get them into jobs that can suit their talents and watch them progress into very,

very productive people." Another challenging part of his job is trying to produce high quality pellets at a lower cost. There is a lot of competition among the different companies and with the recycling of scrap iron.

The young people of today, who want to work in mines, need to develop an understanding in computers and science.

"Twenty-five years ago, they used to say go to college and get a degree and you can get a good job. Now it is go to college, because if you don't go to college, you won't have much of a chance. It's only the real top-notch students coming out of college that get a shot at the good jobs. It's not just what you're doing, but how good you're doing it," Tom explained.

When Tom is not at work he enjoys fishing, camping, canoeing, and boating. He also likes to hunt in the mountains of Colorado and likes outdoor photography.

I am glad I got the chance to interview my dad, because I probably wouldn't have found out so much about him. I am very proud of his hard work and determination to get the job done.