

Brandon Turing

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Life as the Manager

"Republic was the first mine to drill one million feet with a Gardener-Denver 120 drill. That's about 200 miles!" was the response when I asked David Laitinen some unique experiences while being employed in the mining industry.

Dave Laitinen was born on June 1, 1944, in Ishpeming, Michigan. He had two younger brothers: George Jr. and Gary. His father's name was George and his mother's name was Lenore. Dave's wife's name is Janet, and they have three children: Dean, and twins Kelly and Terri.

Dave's job required a higher education than a miner. It required a college degree. Dave graduated from Michigan Technological University as a mechanical engineer.

When Dave got out of high school, mining was very strong and he felt it would be a good way to make a living. Working in the iron industry is like a family tradition because most of his relatives were involved in the iron mining industry.

Dave has worked at many different properties. He worked at the Republic Mine, the Empire Mine, and the Tilden Mine. As well as the main office in Ishpeming and the Brownstone Shops. He also worked three summers at the Eagle Mills Pellet Plant which was the first and original pelletizing plant on the Michigan Range.

Dave currently works at the Empire Mine. His main duty is

maintenance manager, but he has also done productivity studies, engineering studies, and general engineering projects. He has been associated with some of the Cliffs Partnership in Education Programs

Some of the machinery that Dave has worked with includes complicated computers and "pretty exotic vibration analysis equipment," stated Dave. He said that there are a lot of specially designed tools just for the mining industry. There are everything from hydraulic torque wrenches to tire handlers designed to put on fourteen foot tires that weigh twelve-thousand pounds! "Being inventive. That's the challenge in today's workplace," stated Dave. Without all of this specially designed equipment the iron industry would not be as productive as it is today.

Over the years, Dave has witnessed the changing equipment sizes; for instance, "Our Empire truck fleet in 1993 was one of the first in the United States to experiment with and use Detroit Diesel's new 2,500 horse power diesel engine. You can picture that being twenty-five times more powerful than a car engine. I enjoy the outdoor atmosphere of the open pit mining business." People play an important role in Dave's job, and he has made many close friends on the job.

Dave's job does not involve many accidents but "I've seen large trucks run right over a pick-up truck and not even know it," he says. "Mining is a delicate operation that requires constant attention to safety at all times." Dave fortunately has not sustained any injuries while he has been on the job.

There are a lot of funny and unique events that go on every day at Dave's job. One day Dave had to fill out an accident report for a man who fell out of a tree while picking apples for

lunch. "People over the years have put smelling salts in the coils of my chair so when I came to work in the morning, of course, all of the smelling salts broke and, of course, that was always a big joke. We had lots of good times."

Dave has lots of friends to make the time fly by when he is on the job. "I've always felt the UP has been real fortunate to have the quality of people it has and my co-workers within Cliffs have been great people." The people would not hesitate to work all night in a blizzard to get a job done. "It's been a pleasure to work around for twenty-seven years."

Dave has won some awards during his time at Cliffs, he has been awarded plaques, but he thinks the best reward is "being able to work here."

Dave sees a strong future for the U. P. mines. He feels the Tilden and Empire mines have a strong future because of their work force. To remain competitive C.C.I must improve its productivity. "We have to make the best quality pellet for the lowest price on the market," stated Dave. "Every thing else won't matter much if we can't do that."

Dave feels that women play an important role in the industry today. In twenty-seven years Dave has seen women go from clerical workers to operating high tech filter bays.

When Dave is not at work, you could probably find him doing some outdoor activity such as hunting or fishing at his camp on the Dead River Storage Basin. He has made clocks, and he also makes homemade wine.

I had a nice little chat with Dave, and I learned a lot of new and interesting things about his job and his life in general. "They're absolutely fantastic people." That's Dave's favorite

part of his job.