

Good afternoon,

Friends, colleagues, mentors, and the many teammates who have shared a shift or a story with me over the years—thank you for being here.

I stand here as Pat, a team member who walked through these doors in 1984 as an apprentice machinist with more grit than finesse, and more questions than answers.

Forty years later, I am grateful beyond measure that I got to spend my working life in a place that makes things that matter, with people who treat work like a craft and each other like family.

I remember the first time I walked the shop floor—back when the hum of the mills was the loudest voice in the room and you could tell who was on their first week by how wide their eyes were.

I was one of those wide-eyed apprentices.

I had a pocket notebook, a dull pencil, and a supervisor who told me, “If you finish a question, start another.”

That sentence has trailed me through every step I’ve taken here.

In 1988, I certified as a CNC operator, and it felt like being handed the keys to a new language.

Reading code, listening to the spindle, feeling the tiny differences between okay and right—it trained my ear and my patience.

I learned a truth that never got old: parts don’t lie, measurements don’t negotiate, and pride is built in thousandths.

Somewhere along the way, the machines taught me as much as any classroom could.

But people taught me more.

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I've never forgotten the journeyman who stopped me at 2 a.m. on a backshift because my clamps looked "sketchy."

He didn't scold me; he showed me.

That was the day I understood what "safety first" really means—less a slogan, more a duty you owe your neighbor.

That duty shaped a long stretch of my time here.

For twelve years, I had the privilege of chairing our safety committee.

I call it a privilege because it let me see the plant through the eyes of everyone who keeps this place breathing: the operators, the inspectors, the custodial team, the maintenance crew, logistics, and the folks in the offices who make the numbers meet reality.

If we did our job right, you didn't notice a crisis because it didn't happen.

We put in new lockout-tagout routines, adjusted lighting over the older mills to reduce strain, ran drills until they were boring—and boring is beautiful when it comes to safety.

To all the members who volunteered ideas, flagged hazards, and told me bluntly when I was missing something—thank you.

You made this building safer than we found it.

The best days, though, were often about teaching and being taught.

I've had the honor of training over 120 apprentices.

Some rolled in straight from high school, some already parents working a night job and trying to find a better way.

They came with doubts and stubbornness in equal measure.

I saw myself in so many of them.

When an apprentice finally feels the machine "settle" under their hands or trusts their own setup for the first time—there's a look that crosses their face I wish I could bottle.

That look says, "I made this, and it's good."

Not perfect—good.

That's the look that keeps a plant like ours moving.

I want to say to every apprentice I've had the privilege to learn alongside: you

didn't just become operators; you became guardians of our standards.

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Keep pushing us older folks to explain the why, not just the how.

And when you see a better way, show it.

Speaking of better ways, 2010 was one for the books.

I was asked to help lead the lean transition on Line B.

There was some skepticism—okay, a lot.

We had routines older than some of our newest hires.

But we mapped our flow, we listened more than we argued, we adjusted fixtures, we staged tools where hands actually reached for them.

We cut waste on the line by 18 percent and, just as important, we cut eye-rolls by about the same amount.

We proved that lean isn't about moving faster—it's about moving smarter, with respect for every role.

I was proud to be part of that team.

I still keep the first spaghetti diagram pinned in my locker as a reminder: messy lines can become clean paths if you walk them together.

There were harder stretches too.

The winter storm in 1996 is burned into my memory.

A power dip threatened a critical aerospace order that absolutely had to ship.

The lights flickered, the screens went black, and somewhere in the dark a few of us heard the same thought: don't let the work drift.

We stayed the night.

By flashlight, we recalibrated, reset, verified by feel when the gauges were untrustworthy.

When the power steadied and the sun came up, we shipped on time.

That night taught me something I keep close: dedication is a team sport.

No one person saves the day; a handful of ordinary decisions, made together, carry you across.

There have also been moments I never expected.

In 2016, I received the Founders Award.

To be honest, my first instinct was to look behind me to see who they really

meant.

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That day wasn't about me as much as it was about the people who put tools in my hands, the mentors who argued with me until we got it right, and every teammate who refused to cut a corner.

I accepted it on behalf of our shared stubbornness about quality and our refusal to stamp our name on anything that isn't worthy to leave this building.

I want to speak plainly about the values that have guided me here, because they were not decorations on the wall—they were tools we used every day.

Craftsmanship: not the fancy word, the simple practice of caring about the last thousandth as much as the first.

Safety first: the habit of stopping even when your schedule says "go," because sending people home whole is the measure that matters.

Respect for every role: I have never seen a single shipment leave this plant because of one hero; I have seen hundreds leave because everyone—from the tool crib to quality assurance—did their part and credited someone else.

And pride in sending quality out the door, every day: nothing replaces the quiet satisfaction of a clean inspection report and a crate you'd sign your name on.

There are thank-yous I need to say out loud.

To the maintenance crew: you saved my bacon more times than I can count.

I've watched you pull a miracle out of a drawer that looked empty, weld a bracket in a space no human hand could fit, and talk to a stubborn machine until it sighed and did what it was told.

You are the heartbeat that doesn't ask for attention.

Thank you for every late call, every improvised fix, and every time you made me look smarter than I am.

To HR: thank you for backing our apprenticeship grants and believing that talent grows best when you water it early and often.

Those grants opened doors for people who just needed a hard hat and a chance. You helped change families' prospects, not just résumés.

That work echoes far beyond these walls.

To my line leads and supervisors over the years: for trusting me to teach, to chair safety, to lead that lean push, and occasionally to argue until we found common ground—thank you.

You gave me room to try and room to fail safely.

Both kinds of room matter.

To the quality team: thank you for never letting me settle.

I've groaned at a red tag like anyone, but I've also slept better knowing we didn't squint our way past a problem.

And to everyone who shared a shift change, a coffee, a story about grandkids, or a tip about a tricky alloy—thank you.

These floors taught me the difference between a job and a calling.

As I step away from the timeclock, I'm not stepping away from making.

I plan to build a small workshop where the lights don't flicker unless I ask them to.

I'll restore vintage radios—there's beauty in coaxing old circuits back to life, hearing music sing through capacitors that were silent for decades.

I'll give more attention to my tomato plants, which are more honest than I am about whether I remembered to water them.

I'll spend hours by the river with a fly rod, where patience feels like a gift instead of a test.

And I'll keep volunteering at the vocational school, because it still matters to me that the next set of hands learns sooner than I did that craft and character grow together.

I also plan to teach evening classes—fixtures, setup, the “feel” of alignment, the safety rituals that turn into instincts.

If you know someone who'd benefit, send them my way.

This place invested in me; I owe the dividend back to the next generation.

The best plans, though, involve my grandkids.

There's a little dock by the lake where the sun falls just right in late afternoon.

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I plan to sit there with a tackle box, answer questions I can and invent stories for the ones I can't.

And if a grandchild asks what I did for forty years, I'll say, "I helped make things that had to be right, with people who expected the best from each other, and we sent our name out the door with pride."

Before I go, a few hopes for the plant that raised me.

Keep teaching.

No one ever learned from silence; they learn from seeing a hand place the tool just so and hearing the reason why.

Keep learning.

Machines change, materials change, expectations rise.

Curiosity is not a luxury—it's part of the work.

Keep each other safe.

If you're tempted to rush, think of the person working next to you, then slow down.

We owe that to each other.

Hold onto the respect that lives here.

Treat the person cleaning the floor with the same regard as the person signing the purchase order.

Every role is a gear in the same gearbox; strip one tooth and the whole thing shudders.

Honor the craft.

If your name—or our company's name—is on it, let it be something you'd be proud to show your family.

And never forget that dedication is a team sport.

Celebrate the wins together, fix the misses together, and in the middle of every

storm, look for the person whose quiet competence is keeping the rest of you steady.

Be that person for someone else.

I will miss the rhythm of shift whistles and morning walk-throughs, the smell of cutting fluid and the first clean chip off a new setup.

I will miss the easy banter that hides hard-won knowledge, and the sound a pallet makes when it's strapped tight and ready to ride.

But what I will carry with me is better than any keepsake.

It's the certainty that good work, done with care and humility, leaves a trace in the world and in the people who do it together.

If you ever want to trade a story, ask about a stubborn setup, or just say hello, you can reach me at cto@kuchventures.com.

Thank you, each of you, for the lessons, the patience, the arguments that ended in a handshake, the nights we solved a problem nobody would ever see, and the mornings we started fresh anyway.

I walked in as an apprentice and I leave a student still.

That feels exactly right.

Take care of each other.

Send quality out the door.

And may every part you touch carry your pride with it.

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