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The Plant Exchange

The Plant Exchange is produced by members of the Plant Operations Division at the University of Michigan. Its purpose is to inform Plant Operations staff and the university community of activities, accomplishments, and information about our organization and the work we perform.

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Archives of previous Plant Exchange are located at: www.plantops.umich.edu/PlantExchange/

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“To be an organization where all staff are empowered and encouraged to reach their full potential.”

Hopefully, most of you will recognize the above statement as one of our vision statements from Plant Operations’ Strategic Plan. In this issue of the Plant Exchange you will read about a variety of our team members who have taken the above vision very seriously and have built their careers here at the University. Many of our coworkers started their careers as custodians and took advantage of the EWOC program. Others took advantage of a Plant apprenticeship, and many attended college using the university tuition assistance benefit. They then used that knowledge and applied it to their careers and jobs for advancement. Many of the supervisors and managers in Plant Operations owe their progress to these programs. Others have come up through the ranks, using their dedication, internal vigor and technical expertise as an engine to advance their careers.

There are numerous ways to build a career through management or through technical expertise. Whatever the approach, the graduates of the “school of hard knocks” make up the rank and file and leadership in Plant Operations. The focal point of these featured testimonies is that we all have a place in Plant. We all have a role to play regardless of our individual motivations and aspirations. And it is rewarding to note that the University encourages and supports the individual aspirations of its employees.

I believe that Plant exemplifies this support better than any other department at the university. To this end I urge all members of Plant to read the following stories, in the form of answers, from the seven employees who were selected for this special feature in this edition of the Plant Exchange. All seven were asked the same questions, and I thank each of the seven for participating. I know that you will want to approach them on a more personal basis to ask more details. I also want to encourage each member of Plant to take advantage of the training opportunities that are available. I hope you feel free to contact me or any other member of the Plant Lead Team or Plant Academy to seek advice or make suggestions regarding how we can help to focus the University of Michigan’s training and career opportunities to meet your needs and goals.

Rich Robben, Director
Jim Vibbart, Business Manager & Regional Process Implementation Coordinator, Facilities Maintenance

What month / year were you employed with the university? What department? Position title?
February 1981. I was hired as a draftsman in to the Hospital Design Office by Marilyn Pendorf, who now works in AEC.

Please give a general description of relevant jobs and/or levels of education prior to employment with the university.
I worked my way through college. I started at UM in general studies, switched to Washtenaw Community College and earned an Associate’s degree in Electrical Engineering Technology. I worked as a maintenance mechanic/draftsman/warehouse operator at a small manufacturing sales firm in Hamburg, MI called Brandes Sales Company.

Were you enrolled in any type of educational or career advancement program when you first began with the university?
At the time I hired in, a person only needed to complete the 90 day probationary period before they could apply for other jobs. An apprenticeship in the elevator mechanic trade was posted and, having completed my probation, I applied for it. I was hired for the position, but my transfer was delayed until the Trades union contract was settled around the first of August that year. In September, I started back at WCC to take additional classes. The apprenticeship...
Please list the departments, positions, and years (months) that you held the position ending with your current position and the year (month) that you began this position.

February 1981 - July 1981 Draftsman II, University of Michigan, Hospital Design Office
August 1981 - February 1985 Apprentice Elevator Mechanic, University of Michigan, Plant Operations, Maintenance Services
February 1985 - April 1993, Elevator Mechanic/Lead Elevator Mechanic, University of Michigan, Plant Operations, Maintenance Services
April 1993 – October 1998 Foreman - Elevator Shop, University of Michigan, Plant Operations, Maintenance Services
October 1998 – April 2007 University of Michigan, Plant Operations, Utilities & Maintenance Services, Manager/Associate Director – Work Control (now Work Management)
April 2007 – present University of Michigan, Plant Operations, Facilities Maintenance, Business Manager for Zone Maintenance & Regional Process Implementation Coordinator

Please list the education or career programs that you completed while being employed at the university.
I completed a bachelor’s degree in business administration at Cleary University in 1992, prior to being promoted to a foreman. I’ve completed several Plant Academy programs. I also completed the APPA Institute for Facilities Management and earned a certificate in “Lean Office” from the UM College of Engineering, Center for Professional Development.

What positive attributes or attitudes did you demonstrate in each former position – in order to move up to the next position?
As a apprentice, I learned to listen and follow instructions (some of the work was rather dangerous and by not following directions from my fellow workers could have resulted in an injury or worse.)

When I became a tradesman and then a lead person, I learned to take the initiative, to persevere to get the job done, and that I needed more training if I was going to be a decent boss. I went back to college and obtained a bachelor’s degree while working as a tradesman.

When I became a foreman, I did my best create an outstanding elevator shop. For instance, the industry trend in the elevator world was headed toward proprietary equipment. If that trend continued here at the U, we wouldn’t need U-M elevator mechanics because the elevator companies would not share proprietary information with us. I got involved in writing design guidelines for new elevators and developed a “U-M elevator” that our staff could maintain, as well as any elevator company. I got involved with a State of Michigan board, serving on the Elevator Safety Board. I partnered with Bob Snip from Purdue University to start the Big Ten & Friends Elevator Conference, which has evolved into a much larger Elevator U Conference. At the same time, I really learned how to be the boss and the importance of coaching and mentoring. I also learned how to plan work for the crew, how to hire people, and what to do when expectations weren’t being met. I became well-versed in the operations of the HR department.

When I became the manager/associate director for Work Control, I learned about strategic planning, budgeting, the inner workings of university administration, and how effective teams work.

Serving as the business manager for zone maintenance, I utilized literally everything I had learned while working in Plant Operations.

Was there ever a time that you felt like you had reached a plateau in your career at the university? Did you ever have periods of frustration? Disappointments? What did you do to move forward and/or what advice would you give another who is experiencing these same feelings?
I reached two plateaus. First, I had done about all I could as a foreman of the Elevator Shop and was looking for a new challenge. Thankfully, Rich Robben pulled me out and had me start Work Control. After heading up Work Control for nearly 10 years, I knew it was time for a new challenge. I wouldn’t call it frustration, but simply a yearning to do something

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different. Thankfully there was an open position I could assume in Zone Maintenance. There have been times when I wished things went my way......and they didn’t. But I’ve rarely been disappointed working here. And when I am, it’s usually because I’ve let someone down by failing to deliver on a promise I made. The easiest way to succeed, according to Tom Peters, is to “under promise” and “over deliver”. But that’s not as easy as it sounds!

What advice would you give to an employee who would like to move to higher pay grades and new responsibilities?

Prepare yourself by completing your education.

Look for a good mentor and make sure it’s someone who plays by the rules! Ask your supervisor for guidance.

Follow the rules. Be totally accountable to your supervisor for your actions.

Volunteer for assignments, especially when it’s not an appealing job. Become someone a supervision can count on.

Take criticism from peers and do something with it.

Deal with safety concerns immediately.

Remember, it’s a lot easier to deal with little problems...

Treat staff fairly. That doesn’t mean treating them all the same.

My number one rule is: No surprises. I don’t withhold information from my supervisor and I expect the same from my staff.

Keep your eyes open for opportunity. Let your supervisor know you’re interested. Ask them for help getting to where you want to be. A good supervisor will give you good input and help you move along.

Other comments:

The University and Plant Operations has been more than fair with me. I’m glad I made the decision to come here for a career. If I had it to do over again, I wouldn’t change a thing. I’ve had the pleasure of working with a lot of great people. I really appreciate the opportunity Rich Robben gave me back in 1998 when he promoted me out of the Elevator Shop. According to the old timers I worked with, no one had ever been promoted out of the Elevator Shop – and I started to think that was my destiny. Not that elevators aren’t a lot of fun, but I’m sure glad I was able to move on to other challenges.

Camie Munsell, Foreman-Dental School Zone, Facilities Maintenance

What month / year were you employed with the university? What department? Position title?

October/1990 - I was employed by Housing/East Quad - Cook I

Please give a general description of relevant jobs and/or levels of education prior to your employment.

I was hired approximately a year out of high school, and did not have any relevant jobs before I worked here. I did work as a Temporary Employee for Oxford Conference Catering before I was hired as a permanent employee. My education prior to being hired at The University of Michigan was high school and some general courses through Washtenaw Community College.

Were you enrolled in any type of educational or career advancement program when you began?

No
Please list the departments, positions, and years (months) that you held the position ending with your current position and the year (month) that you began this position.

Housing – East Quad/Cook I, 5 months
Plant Building Services/Custodian, 6 years
Plant Fac. Maintenance/Trades Apprentice, 3.5 years.
Plant Fac. Maintenance/Journeyman Insulator, 8 years
U-M Skilled Trades Union/Recording Secretary, 3 years
Plant Fac. Maintenance/Foreman, 3 years (Began in June of 2008)

Please list the education or career programs that you completed while being employed at the university.

Associates of Journeyman Industrial, Washtenaw Community College.
University of Michigan/University of Michigan Skilled Trades Union Apprenticeship Program.
Currently enrolled at Eastern Michigan University in the School of Engineering and Technology's Construction Management Program.

What positive attributes or attitudes did you demonstrate in each former position – in order to move up to the next position?

I looked for mentors in each position, people who had positive qualities and had achieved the goals I wanted to achieve and then learned how they moved into their positions. I also looked for new opportunities where I was currently working and took on new tasks and then improved on them where I could. I would also take the initiative and ask for advice on what courses/degrees to pursue at school and then I would take the courses, and/or secure the degree program to work towards the job I was aspiring to have.

Was there ever a time that you felt like you had reached a plateau in your career at the university? Did you ever have periods of frustration? Disappointments? What did you do to move forward and/or what advice would you give another who is experiencing these same feelings?

Absolutely. I took the ideas and tasks that I was good at and pursued these goals outside of work, like going to school and completing courses that others hadn’t taken along with researching what I needed to do in order to be considered for interviews. Once I established what I needed to do, it gave me a goal and I kept moving forward. This gave me a positive outlook on the future and helped during times of frustration and disappointment.

What advice would you give to an employee who would like to move to higher pay grades and new responsibilities?

Take on any new responsibilities that may come your way. If opportunities are not evident, ask questions on how to advance in your career or find outside influences that can assist you in your goals. Work outside your comfort zone and stretch your knowledge outside of what you are currently doing at work to keep yourself competitive.

Other comments:

Failure is an option... giving up is not.

Lukeland Gentles, Division Controller and Associate Director, Plant Administration

What month / year were you employed with the university? What department? Position title?
August 30, 1999 Hired by Building Services as a Custodial Supervisor

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During each of my previous positions, I maintained a willingness to learn. I was and remain a very active learner. I was very purposeful, in seeking out individuals who could guide my career, and asked their advice. In addition, throughout this journey, I have remained a willing follower. Always speaking positive about those in leadership roles, and always showing respect to the people that I interact with.

**Was there ever a time that you felt like you had reached a plateau in your career at the university? Did you ever have periods of frustration? Disappointments? What did you do to move forward and/or what advice would you give another who is experiencing these same feelings?**

I have been very fortunate to be employed by a great organization that has afforded me many opportunities, and I am extremely appreciative. However, there was one period when I was very frustrated, and unsure about the next step. I had applied for the Building Services Associate Director position, and when I was not selected for the position became disappointed. Now I was very careful not allow my frustration to impact the quality of my work. During this period, I got great support from those close to me, including leaders within Plant Operations. Their support helped me though this tough period.

**What advice would you give to an employee who would like to move to higher pay grades and new responsibilities?**

Colin Powell says it best, “There is no secret to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure.”

To that, I would add, never stop dreaming; be passionate about your dreams, aggressively pursue those dreams; get yourself prepared and stay ready. Do not be afraid to fail. I had many failures, before I landed my dream job.

Work hard at your current position; your best advocate is always the person to which you report. Take on extra assignments, and never turn down an opportunity to develop or learn new skills.

**What positive attributes or attitudes did you demonstrate in each former position – in order to move up to the next position?**
What month / year were you employed with the university? What department? Position title?
February 4, 1980, Utilities Central Power Plant - Boiler Operator

Please give a general description of relevant jobs and/or levels of education prior to employment with the university.
US Navy for four years as a Boiler Technician

Were you enrolled in any type of educational or career advancement program when you first began with the university?
Stationary Engineering and HVAC program at Washtenaw Community College

Please list the departments, positions, and years (months) that you held the position ending with your current position and the year (month) that you began this position.
All positions have been at the Central Power plant.
Turbine Room Foreman: July 1994 - 1996
Operations Supervisor: 1996 - 2004
Plant Superintendent: 2004 - 2010
Operations Superintendent: 2010 – To Present

Please list the education or career programs that you completed while being employed at the university.
National Fire Protection Agency Fire Fighter I & II, officer training; volunteer fire fighter for 11 years.
State of Michigan Emergency Medical Technician
Project Management  University of Wisconsin
Root Cause Analysis Certification
Plant Academy Supervisor Leadership
Plant Academy IFM Series
Plant Academy Practical Supervisor

What positive attributes or attitudes did you demonstrate in each former position – in order to move up to the next position?
Tenacity, willingness to learn, higher work ethics dedication to the CPP and the University, and willingness to go the extra mile

Was there ever a time that you felt like you had reached a plateau in your career at the university?
As Plant Superintendent I felt that I was in a position that I did not belong. I felt that it would better for the University and the Central Power Plant that I give the reins of project management to a more qualified individual.

Did you ever have periods of frustration? Disappointments? What did you do to move forward and/or what advice would you give another who is experiencing these same feelings?
Yes, when trying to maintain multiple projects along with the responsibilities of overseeing all other aspects of the CPP and not making the progress that I felt was necessary. I have not been disappointed with any part of my career at the University.

What advice would you give to an employee who would like to move to higher pay grades and new responsibilities?
Remember your limitations and don’t try to exceed them. Be absolutely sure you are ready for the responsibilities that come with the job, talk to others in similar positions first. Work continuously on personal development both in leadership and technical aspects. Plant Academy and HRD have good classes for the leadership side. Hone your computer skills such as Microsoft Office, Word, Excel, Access or any specialty programs that pertain to your specific job class.
What month / year were you employed with the university? What department? Position title?
July 1, 1990 I started with Building Services as a Custodian II.

Please give a general description of relevant jobs and/or levels of education prior to employment with the university.
Monroe High School Graduate

Were you enrolled in any type of educational or career advancement program when you first began with the university?
No

Please list the departments, positions, and years (months) that you held the position ending with your current position and the year (month) that you began this position.
Building Services 1.5 yrs
Housing 1.5 yrs Cook I
Grounds Dept. GKII 2 yrs
Foreman 23 yrs.

Please list the education or career programs that you completed while being employed at the university.
Classes at Washtenaw CC, Plant Academy, APPA, 7 Habits, CDL, Pesticide Applicators License, numerous seminars

What positive attributes or attitudes did you demonstrate in each former position – in order to move up to the next position?
Honesty, fairness, respect for others, follow-through, hard work, common sense, dedication, customer satisfaction.

Was there ever a time that you felt like you had reached a plateau at the university? Did you have periods of frustration? Disappointments? What did you do to move forward and/or what advice would you give another who is experiencing these same feelings?
Frustration/ Challenge; Moving CC Grounds Operations from Central Campus to North Campus.
Plateau; Grounds Foreman - Moved over to Waste Management.

What advice would you give to an employee who would like to move to higher pay grades and new responsibilities?
Guard your reputation, work hard, don’t always go with the flow (peer pressure, status quo), take advantage of all training opportunities.

Other comments:
I’ve witnessed many positive changes over the years; increase in production, a more diverse workforce, changes in procedures, accountability. From my perspective as a supervisor, I couldn’t be where I’m at without the support from the people I’ve supervised over the years and I would like to thank those individuals for all their hardwork and dedication.
Please give a general description of relevant jobs and/or levels of education prior to employment with the university.

I worked at Spartan Electronics for twelve years, building sonar buoys for six years then became Quality Control inspector for the government products they manufactured. While with the company I received my associate degree from Jackson Community College.

Were you enrolled in any type of educational or career advancement program when you first began with the university?

No

Please list the departments, positions, and years (months) that you held the position ending with your current position and the year (month) that you began this position.

All my 21 years have been with Building Services. I started as a custodian II for PBGS on July 2, 1990 and stayed there until 1992. April of 1992 – May 2000, I was promoted to Custodial Supervisor II. November 2006 – March 2007, I was selected to be the Interim Associate Director of Plant Building Services. Currently, I have advanced to Custodial Area Manager, Plant Building & Grounds Services.

Please list the education or career programs that you completed while being employed at the university.

Accomplishments: Bachelors from Eastern Michigan University, Graduated from Association of Physical Plant Administrator’s (APPA) Facilities Management Institute, Seven Habits Facilitator, Four Roles of Leadership, Member of International Executive Housekeepers Association (IEHA), Graduate of Plant Academy Supervisor Leadership program and FMS

What positive attributes or attitudes did you demonstrate in each former position – in order to move up to the next position?

Having a positive attitude with strong beliefs and values of my jobs, coworkers and bosses. Being motivated, proactive instead of reactive, committed to my jobs and having a strong value of integrity, honesty, and dependability for the customers and university.

Was there ever a time that you felt like you had reached a plateau in your career at the university? Did you ever have periods of frustration? Disappointments? What did you do to move forward and/or what advice would you give another who is experiencing these same feelings?

I can honestly say that I have not felt like I reached a plateau in my career at the university or had periods of frustration and disappointment. I know that is hard to believe but life/work has been good to me and I enjoy both. I think it is important to be optimistic and have a positive attitude on life in general. The rest will follow.

What advice would you give to an employee who would like to move to higher pay grades and new responsibilities?

I would tell a person that he/she needs to go the extra mile and take the initiative in proving yourself. It is important for you to find a job you enjoy and take the appropriate classes to enhance your knowledge and career. Maintain a positive attitude, integrity, and be proactive.

Kevin Perkins, Team Leader, Planet Blue, Plant Operations

What month / year were you employed with the university? What department? Position title?

Hired Jan 1, 1990 by Facilities Maintenance Hospital as an Industrial Electrician.

Please give a general description of relevant jobs and/or levels of education prior to employment with the university.

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Kevin Perkins ... continued from page 11
I had a 2 year Associate’s Degree in Digital Electronics and a number of HVAC certifications as I was working for Johnson Controls.

Were you enrolled in any type of educational or career advancement program when you first began with the university?
Not originally, but a number of years later I went back to complete my undergraduate degree in Electronic Engineering and a minor in Business Management. I also completed Honeywell Certification: Care 7 Operation Software and Hardware Programming.

Please list the departments, positions, and years (months) that you held the position ending with your current position and the year (month) that you began this position.
I was an Industrial Electrician at the Hospital for 19 years. Originally when first hired 1990 I work for Jim Lingenfelter in the IE Shop for about 9 years. Years later I served as a Team Lead Man for the HVAC Shop under Joe Mahler. My main job duties were to perform daily DDC repair and PM on all HVAC Equipment within the complete medical complex.

Please list the education or career programs that you completed while being employed at the university.
Over the years I completed Plant Academy’s Practical Supervisor Series and Supervisor Leadership Program, and also received my Journeyman’s Electrical License. I eventually finished my undergraduate degree in 2007.

What positive attributes or attitudes did you demonstrate in each former position – in order to move up to the next position?
After working at the Hospital for 19 years, I felt it was time for a change and a new challenge within the University community. I’ve always been very outgoing and sociable person with a positive attitude in working with others. I never backed away from challenges and was always looking for new responsibilities and opportunities. In my position as Team Leader with Planet Blue, I have a stronger role as a leader and the flexibility to use my own judgment in making decisions and working with others to find creative solutions to complete the task at hand.

Was there a time you felt like you had reached a plateau in your career at the university?
Did you have periods of frustration? Disappointments? What did you do to move forward and/or what advice would you give another experiencing these same feelings?
After 19 years as a tradesman, I wanted an opportunity to try something new – something that allowed me to engage with a greater diversity of people, situations, and challenges.

What advice would you give to an employee who would like to move to higher pay grades and new responsibilities?
Think outside the box and don’t be afraid to follow your dreams. It takes a lot of courage and faith in yourself to envision doing something different, but the University has so many opportunities and tools to help you get there if you just go for it! It takes a lot of hard work and persistence, but it can pay off big time not only on your pay stub, but more importantly, in the personal sense of accomplishment and gratification.