

## **Roy Williams and others — keys to Y-12's success**

**Or: People are key to Y-12's success (title as it appeared in *The Oak Ridger*)**

Gordon Fee sent me an e-mail on December 23, 2009, noting that Roy Williams had just died. He went on to say that he sure hoped the history of Y-12 would include information on him and others like him over the years who have contributed much to Y-12's success. Gordon said Roy was a "great Production Superintendent who came up through the ranks."

I remember Roy and likely many of you readers do as well. If there was a problem in the production area, regardless of where it was, Roy Williams would show up right there at the machine. He might be there at midnight or on Sunday, you just never knew when he would show up, but he would surely be there.

Roy grew up in Cosby, TN attending Cosby High School and then the University of Tennessee graduating with a BS in Chemistry. He right away went to work for Y-12 during the Manhattan Project in June of 1943 and he may well have worked at Y-12 his entire career. He began as a Junior Chemist and retired as the Production Manager after working here for 43 years.

While I don't know much about Roy's early years at Y-12, some of you might. I would like to capture information about his early years as well as information on several other key individuals in Y-12's history.

Ken Bernander provided information that Roy worked in "Chemical" for his early years beginning in Building 9206 and rose up through the supervisory ranks in that organization. He paid attention to the details as Ken recalls. His routine monitoring of production "transaction clocking" was an example of this managerial trait. Knowing exactly what jobs were being worked and when they were worked is one thing that I am sure kept Roy able to track progress on jobs and know where the trouble spots were developing.

I recall when working in maintenance management that production support craft or first line supervisors would often come to me saying we needed to work on a specific piece of production equipment because they saw Roy Williams there last night. Or, we need to increase the priority on some machine we had in the backlog because Roy Williams was asking about it. We were sensitive to his presence in the work area because we knew it meant something important was going on.

He was always quiet natured and observed what was going on in the work area without interfering with the actual work. However, he could ask some really good questions and just having him show up on a job automatically brought additional attention to it, both from his organization and the maintenance support workers.

Roy Williams and people like him—such as Herman Butler, Ray Quinn, Bill Ebert, Dave Jennings, George Jasney, Bill Thompson, George Evans, Roger Hibbs, Jack Case and many, many others—have made significant contributions to Y-12's success over the years. I know I have left out MANY who should be included in such a list. And I also know that several others at lower levels in the organizations have contributed greatly over the years to Y-12's successes.

I would like to include some details of these type people and their leadership stories in the history of Y-12. If you have information about these former Y-12 leaders and others that you would like to see included, please contact me. E-mail is desired, but phone contact would be great as well. Send information to [draysmith@comcast.net](mailto:draysmith@comcast.net) or call me at 865-482-4224.

These individuals and many others functioned at key positions in Y-12 organizations over the years. It has been noted that Y-12's organizational structure contributed to the development of strong leadership in the middle manager ranks. Many of the superintendents and department head level managers were experienced workers who excelled at individual contributor roles before being promoted into management.

It was not unusual for craft workers to move into supervision and to develop into adept managers. Y-12 has always been known as a place that gets things done as evidenced by the “Can Do” reputation accredited to Jack Case. Of course, Jack could not have produced those results without the help of many at Y-12 who actually did the work.

He was sure ready to hold up Y-12 and the outstanding results regularly produced to anyone who might have work they needed done that could not be done elsewhere. He did not hesitate to bring unusual requests back with him and bring in his team of managers to help figure out how to get it done.

The management level that tended to “run the plant” over the years has been the General Supervisor and Department Manager levels. The Division Managers made key decisions, but they routinely relied upon the Department Superintendents to carry out the necessary actions to make the end result meet expectations.

Of course, without the front line supervisors and craft workers, the minute details needed to accomplish work could not have been done. The team at Y-12 goes from the working floor to the highest levels of management...with each functioning in the interest of the overall task accomplishment.

Soon we will explore some of the specific work done at Y-12 over the years that upheld the ‘Can Do’ reputation of meeting schedules, accomplishing the seemingly impossible and working with the many unusual materials routinely.

Y-12’s reputation over the years remains to this day, as Gordon Fee says in “Y-12’s Changing Face” video that is constantly being shown in the Y-12 History Center, “if you can’t get the job done anywhere else, bring it to Y-12...they can do it.” It is Roy Williams and people like him who have built this reputation and sustained the momentum of Y-12 successes over the years.