Dear Mike Kukla

Happy Retirement

The Filter Press
Chemical Engineering Student Society (ChESS) Newsletter
Summer 1998
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- "Mike Kukla is going to retire in August!"
- "ARE YOU KIDDING ME?!?"

Upon hearing of Mike Kukla's retirement, a bittersweet feeling circulated throughout the halls of Joseph Koffolt Labs. Although happy that Mike can now retire to the "good life," many asked themselves if they were ready to let go of a man who routinely accomplishes tasks that are, more often than not, taken for granted. Mike has been a part of Koffolt Labs dating back to 1964, even before the civil rights movement that occurred right here on our very own OSU campus and the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King. Accordingly, Mike Kukla has performed many thankless jobs for great many people. It is our privilege to compile a special edition of the Filter Press, and dedicate it to Mike Kukla. Hopefully through this edition, Mike will be reminded that he will be greatly missed.

Many thanks go to the faculty, staff, current graduate and undergraduate students. Special thanks should be extended to Dr. Smith, Bill Walters, the alumni that took part in this project, and Brian Collett and Lee Richards who helped proofreading.

Mike, we love you and will deeply miss you.

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Milwaukee’s Best

A candid interview of Magic Mike Kukla by Himanshu Gupta and D.J. Lee.

Q: What did you do prior to joining OSU?

Mike: I grew up in the Land of Beer - Milwaukee, Wisconsin - and went to University of Wisconsin and then to MIT - better known as Milwaukee Institute of Technology (!) - before serving in the Navy for a couple of years. This was followed by a brief three-year (compared to the tenure at OSU) stint at RCA in Cambridge, Ohio.

Q: How did you finally decide upon Ohio?

Mike: I headed south in search of a warmer place and I settled for Ohio as it had the right trade-off between the heat and the size of the bugs (which obviously gets bigger the further south one goes).

Q: Are the professors who interviewed you for this job still around?

Mike: I joined in February 1964, and yes, folks you guessed it right, Prof. Brodkey was around then as well. Profs. Koffolt and Geankoplis were the other panel members. I joined as a lab technician taking over from Herman, the guy before me, who had passed away. No! not due to being overworked – that was what Prof. Koffolt assured me(!).

Q: How has the department changed over the last 35 years?

Mike: The building has been changed by adding more modern instrumentation. The working atmosphere has also changed. The student-faculty interaction has become more informal, though not at the expense of respect students have for the faculty.

Q: Leak us some information on one of your most embarrassing moments.

Mike: Well, my kids would not want me to divulge this information to you, but when I was in the Navy I was stationed on a destroyer and you know, how all the ships are painted battleship gray. One night I ended upon an aircraft carrier and wondering “Gee our ship doesn’t have any planes on it!” Finally after roaming on the huge carrier for 2-3 hours I realized I was on the wrong ship and finally made my way to the destroyer. Boy, was it embarrassing to walk on an aircraft carrier by mistake. (Now, whether this happened under the influence of home brewed Milwaukee beer is still under investigation).

Q: What are your other passions in life besides Chemical Engineering?

Mike: Tinkering with my car. Working around the house. I put an addition to our house including a bedroom, a kitchen, and a bathroom. This one time (Mike’s patented style of the phrase), when I was in school, I made a canoe in the basement of our old house. When it was done, despite earlier warning from my father, we could not take it out through the back door and we ended up breaking down a portion of the wall to get it out. Later we put in a window there for extra sunshine. Besides these I was never really into games. You can get hurt in football, baseball is slow and tennis didn’t agree with me.

Q: How has Unit Ops evolved in the last 30 years?

Mike: The emphasis has changed from more experiments to more paperwork. This is the only time these students get hands on experience. Years ago, when Prof. Koffolt was in charge, the students used to go home at 11 or 12 in the night if they finished early.
Q: What was the most extreme event that ever took place at OSU?

Mike: This one time, in summer, there was a lot of rioting in connection with the Vietnam War. The police were shooting tear gas all over the place filling all the labs and the building and no one could even breathe. The students quickly grasped the situation and next time they rioted in North Campus and as soon as the police arrived, they ran off to South Campus to continue rioting, with the police giving the chase. This went on for a while until the National Guards arrived and blocked shoulder to shoulder all the way on nineteenth avenue and the rioters had nowhere to go. This was probably the most extreme incident that comes to my mind. Of course the reason behind the riot was to continue the demonstrations as long as possible and hope the university gives a passing grade to everybody without studying and exams, you know the students’ age-old trick(!).

Q: Tell us about a hilarious incident in the department.

Mike: There was a faculty member (whose name I can’t reveal) who had a habit of taking the tour of the departmental facilities to alumni on the Apc day a little too seriously. He insisted all the graduate students, minus his own, to label each and every piece of equipment, even simple and obvious ones like stirrer, water bath, etc. You get the picture. Slowly, the students came to know that his students were having a relatively easier time. The next year the alumni were rather taken aback when they entered the building and saw those big labels from Toys ’R Us like “DOOR”, “WINDOW”, etc. The involved faculty finally got the point.

Q: Do you have any regrets? What did you hate most in your job?

Mike: Not really. Life has been pretty satisfying here. I did have offers from elsewhere but a few extra bucks were not worth the effort. The thing I hated most was paperwork. That and giving retirement interviews. Guess that’s another reason for sticking here this long.

Q: What were the main reasons you have been with this department for 34 years?

Mike: Relaxed atmosphere, new projects, easy-going professors, know-it-all graduate students (!?) and freedom to do what I like seemingly went well with my constitution. There was hardly any job satisfaction in the industry making one thing over and over again for 30 years.

Q: With your experience in this department, how do you picture our department in the next 10 years.

Mike: They are talking about remodeling this whole building. They are going to replace the utilities and except for the structure everything else would be new. When I came here, this was primarily a teaching institution with 30 undergraduates, 7-8 Ph.D. students and 15 M.S. students. Now the numbers have more than doubled. We will probably have more than 30 faculty members and way too many pesky graduate students.

Q: How do you see yourself in ten years time?

Mike: I haven’t really thought about the future yet. Maybe a small vacation followed by, frankly I don’t have a clue(!).

If you ever wondered how Mike has so much knowledge and information, it is because of his inability to follow simple instructions. On a previous job, the workers were instructed to RUN AWAY if ever a fire broke out. Our Mike, well versed as he is in numerous fire fighting techniques, RAN but to the nearest fire extinguisher and bravely put the fire out. Overnight he became a hero.

We thank Mike for sharing his memories with us, and we’d like to let him know that his absence will be felt. We wish him good luck and a happy retirement.
Dr. L.-S. Fan, Chair

It is my pleasure to write a tributary paragraph to Mike Kukla. Mike will be long remembered in the Department of Chemical Engineering at Ohio State. Mike is probably the most committed, multi-faceted, totally dedicated employee that I have known. Not only does Mike do a job well, but he always looks for the optimum benefit to the student, faculty or department. Over the years, Mike has contributed much to the success of the Department and his willingness to assist in whatever capacity needed, from design engineering to moving equipment, is unparalleled. Mike has the kind of work ethic and attitude that should serve as an inspiration to all the students with whom he has had contact. I am sure that Mike figures in many memories our graduate students carry with them as they leave OSU. With Mike’s unique wit and readiness to assist, he will figure long in the memories of all of us here in the department. We sincerely hope he will remember us too and continue to visit us for many years to come. If Mayors can give keys to their Cities to important personages they feel have benefited their city by their presence, it would be my pleasure to give Mike a key to the Department, as I can think of no other employee that has benefited the Department to the same extent as Mike.

Mike Kukla (my doll)

by Dr. Robert Brodkey

Of the possible several million stories about Mike, probably the most noteworthy is his secret for electronic equipment repair.

TEST I:
First, remove the cover.
Second, shake well.
Third, reassemble by replacing the cover.
No other repairs are to be undertaken.
Fourth, test.

TEST II:
If that does not work, repeat the process.
At the second step, consider a swift kick to the side of the equipment and then proceed to the next step.

TEST III:
If all of this fails, and only if it all fails, consider looking at the circuit diagram and repeat test II.

It is hard to believe that Mike Kukla will leave this department soon. Mike has done so much for us. When we need something in the building, we call Mike! When something goes wrong in the building, we call Mike! My students and I have got so much used to having Mike’s capable hands around us, from designing research devices for graduate students, showing movies or video tapes to undergraduates, renovating laboratory space, fixing equipment, finding used office furniture with good quality, to answering my questions regarding plumbing, automobile maintenance, painting, back pain……

Mike! We’ll miss you badly.

Dr. Jim Lee
Dr. Umit S. Ozkan

When Zhiqing asked me to write a short paragraph about Mike Kukla, I was overwhelmed with the memories that came gushing in, some of them dating back to the first days after I joined the faculty as a young assistant professor, and some more recent. Where does one start? And how can one possibly put into words what Mike has given to each of us over all these years? Do I start with the time when, during my first week in the department, I called Mike after my chair broke apart and I found myself sitting on the floor and Mike, with his usual sense of humor, told me that it was some sort of a test to see if I would survive this job? Or do I mention the time when I solicited his help to chase a mouse out of my office? Do I talk about how he managed to collect evidence when my office was broken into? Or do I reminisce about how he fixed 30-year old equipment items without once referring to a user-manual? Do I include his resourcefulness in solving problems, his willingness to help, his exemplary sense of duty, his kindness and his patience? Or do I talk about how he, single-handedly, kept the building functioning from the "dungeons" in the basement to the penthouse at the top? Do I talk about the many experiments he saved or the many lives he touched? Yes, it is very difficult to talk about Mike.

I know we will miss him a lot. We will miss his creativity, his resourcefulness, and his dedication. We will miss his knowledge, his experience, and his skills. We will also miss his wisdom, his wonderful sense of humor, and his friendship. All I can hope is that he does not get an unlisted number.

Dr. James Rathman

It's hard to imagine how Koffolt will survive without Kukla. It's even harder to imagine how Kukla has survived this long in Koffolt. Has anyone found an instrument he couldn't fix? A student he couldn't help? A work crew he couldn't motivate? (Well, OK - even Mike hasn't been able to prevent the carnage inflicted whenever a person from UNITS enters the building to "fix" the phone system, but I have to believe he's helped minimize the damage.) He does it all and does it well, always staying calm and always with a keen sense of humor. I feel lucky to have worked with him and will surely miss him. Is the world of golf ready for Mike Kukla? Stay tuned...
Dr. Edwin Smith

The ultimate disaster has struck! The one indispensable person in the chemical engineering department is leaving! What shall we do without him?

Some of you who haven't had much contact with Mike Kukla will think this is overstating the situation—not so! I have been around the department long enough to know what happens when Mike goes on vacation. Laboratory work usually comes to a screeching halt when equipment breaks down, service people do not know where to go or when to come, and faculty and students' cries for help go unanswered. I always tried to plan my vacations when Mike had his.

Where will all the grad students, faculty and staff go for a cup of coffee and some sage and witty advice on their (and the world's) problems? I am not saying this because we are supposed to be kind to the old folks who are retiring but because I have never met a person I have enjoyed or appreciated more than Mike. I have never left his room without a good laugh and/or valuable advice; I have never made a request of Mike he hasn't fulfilled; I have never been able to understand how he could maintain his good humor in the face of all the ridiculous demands made on him and not complain. I would not say he is a saint, but he comes pretty damn close.

His outstanding work has not gone unnoticed. The first year O.S.U. decided to recognize staff members, Mike won the award as the outstanding staff person at The Ohio State University.

I am sure going to miss him!!!!

Dr. Kurt Koelling

Five years ago I came to OSU as a young assistant professor without any research facilities. My assigned laboratory, 412 Koffoit, contained 50 year old thermodynamics equipment, no air conditioning and over 1000 pounds of mercury! Mike Kukla was instrumental in transforming my old laboratory into a state of the art polymer engineering research facility. I will be forever indebted to Mike for his dedication to help my group conduct research at the highest level. I would also like to thank Mike for all of his efforts to design, construct, and instrument the rheological measurement lab, extrusion lab, injection molding lab, and new office space. I will end with an inside joke which only Mike will understand. There are a million reasons for which "Koelling on the 4th floor" would like to see "Kukla on the 3rd floor" stay in the department for another 30 years, but only a single reason for which I hope he will leave. This involves Mike's amazing ability to remember and quote the square footage of every room within Koffoit Lab! Enjoy retirement and remember that you will always be welcome back in Koffoit as a design engineering consultant.

Mike Kukla is the unique individual that every organization needs to have. He has the pragmatic wisdom that comes from a healthy view of himself and others, as well as many years of "having seen it all". Finally, each day, he always had a story or comment which would make me smile.

Dr. Jeff Chalmers
Dr. Jacques Zakin, Department Chair from 1977-1994

When I came to Ohio State in 1977, I was told that Mike Kukla was a vital member of the Department, that I could always rely on him to take care of any assigned task, that he would complete the task on time or before the promised time, and that it would probably more than meet specifications. All of this turned out to be true.

I have read scores of graduate student and faculty acknowledgements of Mike’s help in their research experiments and informal tributes to the “government jobs” he has performed. His role in the Unit Ops Lab has aided countless undergraduates and their TA’s. It is clear that he has been a major contributor to the success of the Department, of the faculty, and of the students in the thirty + years he has worked in the Department.

Mike and Nancy, along with many other co-workers, students and alumni, I wish you a long, healthy and happy retirement. But come around periodically, we’ll need you to help solve some of our more intractable equipment problems.

Dr. David Tomasko

I can’t recall any time when I talked to Mike about any kind of problem and he didn’t have an answer. I think about the times I’ve taken things to him and (as Rathman first noted) he would start by CLEANING the instrument. If I had half as much common sense... The other magical skill that Mike possesses is the ability to put up with and manipulate the university system. Any of us who have needed university electricians or maintenance people in our labs to do something know that without Mike overseeing the job it wouldn’t get done right nor in any reasonable time frame. Last and most important, I’m going to miss his quiet stroll down the hall at 8 in the morning with that wry sense of humor always catching me off guard.

Dr. James Davis

From my perspective Mike is “THE MAN.” In a very real sense, he has single-handedly kept the department in operation. He certainly has ensured classrooms have supplies and that the blinds open and close, made research equipment work (countless times), maintained computer hardware, installed networks, designed and built all kinds of equipment, fixed just about anything that is mechanical or electrical, kept an impossible unit operations laboratory working, and took pictures of just about anything and anyone. The list is endless. While all of these are important, I think his most important contribution has been his role in making this department among the best places to be a part of. In looking back over the time I have been here, Mike helped me “understand the system,” provided counsel, generated creative solutions and offered support to many problems. I know this same openness has been extended to everyone. The overall impact has been a remarkable contribution to the department and its success. The discussions around the coffee pot are and will be missed. Mike, Thank you.
Dr. Bhavik Bakshi

My introduction to Mike Kukla’s expertise and importance in the department was within the first 10 days of my joining Ohio State. I had bought a used car, and had been trying to get the old number plate off. In the process, I even broke a new flat-head screwdriver! I mentioned this to Mike, and he suggested that I should drive the car into the unit operations lab for him to take a look at. Being left with no other options, I drove the car in with the expired number plate, and brought it into the lab. Within less than 10 minutes, the old number plate was out and the new one was in. I realized that even though I was going to be doing theoretical research, Mike Kukla was going to be an indispensable source of knowledge and expertise. We will certainly miss him, and wish him all the best.

Mike Kukla helped me to construct a new facility for heat transfer in drag reducing flow in this year. He has a wide and deep knowledge as an engineer. At the same time, he is helpful and has a sense of witiness. I believe he is the most suitable person to work in Koffolt lab. It is regrettable that I will not be able to meet him here when I come back to this lab in

Dr. Yasuo Kawaguchi

Visiting Scholar from Japan (’97-’98)

“When I was in school, I made a canoe in the basement of our old house. When it was done, despite earlier warning from my father, we had to break down a portion of the wall (right side of Mike) to get it out. Later we put in a window there for extra sunshine.”
So long... farewell... yada, yada, yada. Just kidding... To paraphrase Emerson, if knowing is the measure of the man, by how much he knew, so he was. In case I never told you, I'm in awe of how much you know (and how much you accomplished). I am disappointed to hear of your retirement for a purely selfish reason—I'll miss you! But, what the heck, you're such a decent guy you deserve to be able to get on with your life, unencumbered by "the daily grind." Goodbye, thank you for everything and good luck! Remember, one door closes, another slams in your face...

I started working in Chem. Eng. in Jan of 95. It has been like any other job, fun at times and hell at others. Mike has come shining through in both cases. Mike has been a very good man to work with. He is very knowledgeable in his job, and has been helpful with all aspects of the job. I wish him the best of luck in the future and a pleasant retirement.

While I have only been with the Department a short time, one of the many bright spots of my time here has been working with Mike Kukla. Being new, sometimes it takes awhile to adjust to new ways of doing something... but Mike Kukla put me straight right from the start! He has been a great source of information and inspiration and I will truly miss him. But what I will miss most of all is Mike calling out "MAIL FOR LORI" for EVERY piece of paper that he puts into my in-box. Mike, YOU WILL BE MISSED!

Mike's Nemesis by Kathleen Doddroe

I have always considered Mike Kukla a walking enigma. It takes new employees several months to figure out that he often is speaking satirically so they will never know his true opinion about anything (!). I don't think Chemical Engineering will ever see or find anyone to match Mike's versatility or technical abilities. If Mike can't fix it or if he doesn't know where to take it to get fixed, it should be thrown out and replaced with a new one. I worked for this Department back in 1980 to 1983, and remember when he received the Outstanding Employee Award. Back then it was university-wide and quite an honor. It was truly a well-deserved award and we were all tremendously proud. When I came back in 1994, the first thing I noticed is that the Department appeared to be in a time warp; it was like stepping back to 1980. The building seemed perfectly preserved. It you have worked around OSU any length of time you know this is not usually the case. Either some bad renovation has been done or the building will definitely look ten years older. Speaking of renovations, this is the only building I have worked in that had someone like Mike who really looked out for the Department when renovations were performed by outside workmen, and the Department benefited tremendously. There are many things that I have always admired about Mike and I appreciate all that he has been to the Department these many years and expect he will be sorely missed.
Ode to a Bull Fighter - Mike Kukla

From Milwaukee, Wisconsin, don't call him a cheesehead
to the Ohio State University I'll go, he said
So 33 years ago, he started a job
in the Department of Chemical Engineering, who'd have thought for so long?
He worked with them all, from Professors Koffolt to Fan
they were just Ph.D's, he was more like Superman
From his 3rd floor office in Koffolt Lab
off to work he would go, all his tools in hand
Fixing reactors, pumps, valves, and all sorts of machines
This man was a problem solver, he could fix anything
The department staff have come to him many a time
he has repaired copiers, computers, printers, and blinds
And when the faculty asked Mike, How can we do this?
the Design Engineer, has always had the answers
To the students, he might have been most important of all
always there to encourage, and help them along
Truer words about Mike Kukla, have never been spoken
"If he could not fix it, then it just wasn't broken!"

Editor's comment: In Bill's The best things about working in the Chemical Engineering Department, "Hearing Mike Kukla's favorite jokes over and over again" ranked number six.

Mike Served as a radarman in the U.S. Navy from 1956 to 1958
The legend of Mike's Car

Cited from 1997 Summer Edition of the Filter Press

Have you guys seen the 1965 Ford Falcon parked outside Koffolt's front door? This is Mike Kukla's little baby. I had a chance to sit and talk to Mike about this hot rod and got a lot of interesting information.

Mike was about 27 years old when he first layed eyes on this black driving machine. He bought it because his wife thought it was ugly. It was, however, a nice change from his beat up 58' Ford convertible he had before.

Mike likes the Falcon for it's reliability. Whereas his newer cars sometime fail to start on the colder winter mornings, the Falcon never fails on cold Columbus mornings. Over the years Mike has only made minor repairs on the car's massive engine. He has kept a gas log for 30 years now and can tell you what gas mileage he was having Sept. 3rd, 1975. On the average, the Falcon gets 16-26 MPG.

You might not know that Mike is a real speed demon. The Falcon can speed from 0 to 60 in less than a minute. Now, Mike bought this baby well before the invention of radials. It used to take the corners like a big tank, but now the radials show much improvement. Mike has had this machine up to 110 mph before! When asked about the brakes on the car Mike replied: "Well, I never hit anything."
The Evil Mike

Shu-Chien Liang, Ph.D.
(graduated in 1995, currently working at DuPont, Agricultural Products)

While most OSU graduates are saying extravagant praises about Mike and making up laundry lists of his outstanding accomplishments, I just can’t betray my conscience to hide his true nature from the innocent souls that he has cheated for decades. At the risk of retaliation, I am willing to reveal his dark side. This is my last chance to prove that truth will always prevail.

Do you know how Mike’s neighbor’s cat disappear? Since her disappearance, there were many conspiracy theories floating around. One of them was that she ran away with her new boyfriend to escape the abuse from her masters. You know what? She actually was kidnapped by Mike on a beautiful Sunday afternoon. While she was innocently wandering into Mike’s garden, the animal-hating Mike grabbed a huge fish net, captured the poor cat and sent her to the animal shelter. No one has ever seen her since.

Mike’s brutality doesn’t stop at non-family members; in fact, he has been plotting against his daughters since their birth. Mike might pretend to be a loving father at home but he just can’t hide his true nature once he gets out of his house. On numerous occasions, he begged me and many other graduate students to help find men for his daughters. You don’t want to know how much money he was offering to whomever takes his daughter away. What a father!

Are you still under the illusion that Mike treated you respectfully? Let me tell you a story about Koffolt. One time I was on my way to the computer room, I found Mike was staring at Koffolt’s portrait. I am 100% sure that he was mumbling about how huge and ugly Koffolt’s hands were; so much to say about respect for a dead person.

When I was looking for a restaurant for my wedding reception, I went to Mike as I usually did when I needed Mike to help me with my experimental design. Being blinded by his usually disguised smile, my fiancé and I took his suggestion and made arrangements with DaVinci’s restaurant. It was not until after our reception that Mike innocently admitted to us that he forgot to mention that DaVinci’s used to be a graveyard. As you can tell, he is a really evil person.

As much as I would like to reveal the lesser known facts about Mike, I have to admit that it would have taken me longer to finish my degree if not for Mike. I went to him for all kinds of experimental design problems, electrical, mechanical, you name it. Want to know where and how to get things done in the University, go to Mike. You can even have Mike fix your VCR and all kinds of appliances at no charge. Was there a saying that behind everyone successful man, there is a woman? I would say, behind every Chemical Engineering graduate, there is Mike.

Happy Retirement, Mike.
THE END OF AN ERA?

Paul Kust, Ph.D.
(graduated in 1997, currently working at the Center for Bio/Molecular Science and Engineering, Naval Research Laboratory, Washington D.C.)

I have listened to those who remember the Koffolt years, brood over the Hearing years, and even think over the long tenure of Dr. Zakin. I cannot remember anyone who spoke of what Koffolt lab was like before Mike Kukla. Now, those who cannot imagine life before Mike must suffer life after Mike. In doing so, they will (soon) have the opportunity to remember the "Golden Age," when there was one person in the department who knew how to fix it, where to get it fixed, or what to do if it couldn't be fixed. I know that I sought his assistance and advice on numerous occasions; fixing a stir plate, installing an air filter, scoring a gas regulator and some fittings, and fixing a leaking drain myself instead of calling a plumber. And though I didn't drink coffee (his or anyone else's), I did use his microwave on occasion (no fish!).

I join with those of Koffolt's past and present in thanking Mike Kukla for invaluable help during my tenure and for service and commitment to the betterment of graduate and undergraduate education at OSU Chemical Engineering. I wish him well in his future, and I hope he enjoys it with an unlisted number (remember The Godfather -- "I keep trying to get out, but they keep pulling me back in ...")

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Everything I Need to Know I Learned from Mike Kukla

Ellen Silva, Ph.D.
(graduated in 1997, currently working at General Mills, Minnesota)

- Clean up your mess before it stinks up the building.
- Always have a roll of duct tape on hand - better yet, two rolls of duct tape.
- A title in front of your name is neither necessary nor sufficient to indicate excellence.
- Teenagers should be routinely embarrassed by their parents. If they aren't, try harder.
- If you supply inexpensive coffee, they will come.
- Often, a little attention is all you need to fix something (or someone).
- Share your tools, but write down who borrowed them.
- If you work steadily, 8 to 5 is long enough.
- Minnesota is colder than Wisconsin.
- There's not a whole lot worth taking too seriously, including yourself.

Thanks, Mike, for the life lessons and especially for not retiring before I graduated.
I Want to be Like Mike......

Mahesh Kurnthekar, Ph.D.
(Graduated in 1996, currently working at the Advanced Engineering 
& Business Development Group, Impco Technologies)

In September 1990, I arrived in this great Buckeye country and began which were some of the most formative years of my career. On the very first day I was instructed by someone to go see Mike Kukla in Room 303. I was told “He’ll take care of you!” I kept wondering what it exactly meant. Little did I know at that time that this guy was going to get me through my tenure at Ohio State. When I met him, the first thing he did was to zap my picture on a Polaroid and put it on the board on the first floor right near the entrance. I felt like I was on the ‘America’s Most Wanted’ list at that time. Soon followed the ritual of handing over of the keys to the main entrance of the building. He reminded me that he would be deducting the money for the keys and the entire department locking system if I ever lost that key. For the next few years I held on to that key like a drowning man would hold on to a log of wood.

During research Mike was very helpful right from building reactors to trouble-shooting them. He may not have realized but his help was crucial to me as well as several other students in the department. I bet there is not a single thesis, which comes out of the department without acknowledging his help.

Mike, I hope you have a long, healthy, and happy retirement. Thank you for the support and help. In your honor here is my Top Ten Things which I always wondered about Mike:

10) Does Mike have any shirt, which is not white in color?
   (except the WISCONSIN sweatshirt he bought when the Badgers won the Rose Bowl)
9) Is Mike a real Buckeye or is he an infiltrator from the Badger camp?
8) Why does Mike go to McDonalds every pay day to buy a hamburger?
7) Does Mike ever take vacation?
6) What does Mike do to all the Polaroid after the students’ graduate?
5) How can he keep himself sane for so many years in such an insane environment?
4) Who hired Mike? Dr. Zakin or Dr. Joe Koffolt? (Oh boy! if Dr. Koffolt hired him
   it has been a real long time and he definitely deserves a break)
3) Where does Mike get his sarcastic sense of humor?
2) When is Mike going to retire his 1965 Ford Falcon?

And the #1 question I have about Mike is (drum roll please ...)

1) How come Mike’s coffee price is insulated from the inflation? !!
   (It was 5 cents/cup from 1990 to 1997)
The MAN

A. Ghosh-Dastidar (Ghosh), Ph.D.
(graduate in 1993, currently working at Union Carbide, Bound Brook)

"Plan accordingly guys. Mike won't be coming in next week." That's how even a short absence of Mike Kukla from the department used to be viewed by the rank and file of graduate students. Those words would throw us into a state of panic, make us huddle and figure out how to extract the essentials from Mike before he was off for vacation. It was as if our survival itself in the department was at stake. Now that Mike is leaving the department for a more active (you bet!) retirement life, I realize how lucky we were to have him around during my six years in the department. It is an immense loss for the department, and needless to say, those who are doing full time experimental research will surely feel the pinch in the coming days. The common wisdom among the graduate students was that the snail-paced elevator in the department added an extra quarter to our Ph.D. time, but thanks to Mike we got back two. Now, once Mike is gone, poor current graduate students, you are just left with the elevator!

And not that we always went to Mike with specific needs in mind and all he would do was supplying them from his endless stock. He was the best troubleshooter and problem solver of the department. Often we would go to him saying, "Mike, we are trying to build this... (read, no clue) which will work like this... (read, vague idea)." His response would so lift our spirits: "I think I may have what you want, give me an hour" and bingo, there it was, just made especially for my application. It was also not all work and no play. Our typical mornings in school began in Mike's office, with a cup of his nicely brewed coffee. There we would often go over the latest and hottest national and local news and look for Mike's unique and often hilarious spin on the issue. One thing the department will sorely miss is Mike's sense of humor. He was often running all day with an endless list of work, which only grew as he came across the faculty members, post-doctorates, and graduate students in the hallways. But he never lost his calm, poise, and humor. In my 6-year stay at OSU, I never saw Mike irritated or upset in spite of our incessant and often dumb requests.

And, how good was he in his job! I heard someone say that Lovell (Apollo 13) could fly and land a washing machine, if only Mike had made its wings, and landing gear. Of course, the immaculate condition of his pre-historic car bears testimony to that. That by itself served to catapult Mike into OSU-wide fame, making big stories in the Lantern. On the other hand, however, Mike's best efforts to propagandize his bull-fighting skills went largely unnoticed.

There are only an exceptional few who really make a difference wherever they go or whatever they do. Mike is surely at the top of that list. He will be sorely missed by everyone in the department. And that is not only because Mike was so helpful, creative, and efficient, but because on top of everything, he was a really good man. One of those people who would uplift your spirit day in and day out. When the going gets tough and the coming days look bleak, these are the people you need the most in the workplace. Mike, it is the department's loss but your family's gain.

All The Best, Mike!
Good luck, Mike!

Marianne Smith, Ph.D.
(graduated in 1992, currently working at International Paper)

It's hard to believe that Mike is retiring... I thought it was bad when he took vacation!! When I heard the news, I started to reminisce about my years as a graduate student at OSU, and what a big role Mike had. His technical assistance in instrumentation and repair was invaluable - when there was trouble or a piece of equipment was broken, I always felt better when Mike said “I'll take a look at it”. Of course, we also knew that when we were feeling discouraged (or just needed a break) we could stop by Mike's for a cup of freshly brewed coffee. It's funny that although I don't even drink coffee, I was probably there just as much as the most caffeine-addicted! You could always count on Mike to have a few words of wit and wisdom.

Some of Mike's antics that I think I'll always remember include the “notes” that Dr. Ozkan’s plants suddenly sprouted when Mike was plant sitting; the time Mike asked for 60,000 T-shirts (one for each student on campus) from a vendor who advertised “free T-shirts” to each caller (I understand they never arrived); and of course, his monthly trek to McDonald's for a hamburger bought with all the pennies from the coffee fund.

The ChE department just won't look the same without that black Falcon parked out front! Good luck, Mike!

How has Unit Ops evolved in the last 30 years?
Mike: The emphasis has changed from more experiments to more paperwork. This is the only time these students get hands on experience. Years ago, when Prof. Koffolt was in charge, the students used go home at 11 or 12 in the night if they finished early.
Mike, can you take a look at my system here. I've checked everything and I can't seem to get it to work. I've changed the vacuum pump oil...

I've replaced the power supply, changed the o-rings, installed better temperature sensors, checked all the resistors and capacitors, checked the whole system for leaks, replaced the needle valves, replaced the pressure gauges, replaced all belts, changed the...

Wait a minute there chief.

Did you try plugging it in?

Sure thing. All in a day's work.

Thanks Mike!

Mike Kukla -
Professional Design Engineer
by Rick B. Watson

Cartoon Corner
Undergraduates will miss Kukla’s help

Michael Timko
(B.S. in 1998, pursuing Ph.D. at MIT)

Pretty much no matter what the situation, for students, faculty, and staff in the department the first person to look for to get the job done is Mike Kukla. Need a part for your apparatus? Ask Mike. Blow a fuse on your Variac? Ask Mike. Air conditioning isn’t working? Need to find a mechanic for a brake job? I think you get the picture... Together with Carl Scott, Mike Kukla has taken care of just about everything that has gone wrong in Koffolt Lab for a long time. The manual for Unit Ops claims that Mike, “is capable of fixing nearly everything.” The first time that I read that line, I couldn’t help laughing a little. After two and a half years of relying on Mike just to get an experiment started, I couldn’t agree more.

The signs in Koffolt bear testimony to the respect that Mike commands. Look carefully. On the first floor, next to the elevator there is a sign which directs routine problems to “Mike Kukla”. Written in pencil in front of his name is “Mr.”. The letter “M” has been written over with a “D” so that now the sign reads “Dr. Mike Kukla”. Somehow, Mike is too important not to deserve the title of doctor.

Although Mike is vital to the research efforts of the department, probably his single most important duty is organizing Unit Operations Lab. As a teaching assistant, I can’t count the number of times that I have directed a student to Mike. Thermometers, stop watches, hard hats, gloves, chemicals, you name it, Mike is the one to ask. Even more important is Mike’s relaxed attitude. As a student, I remember asking him for a pair of gloves for an experiment in which we were required to filter CaCO₃ from a slurry. Mike couldn’t resist the opportunity to leave the advice, “Be careful, I hear that they have chalk and water out there!”

Given all that he does and the way that he does it, you can imagine my response when I heard that this would be Mike’s last summer with the department. After 35 years with Chemical Engineering, Mike is retiring this August, leaving a vacancy that will be nearly impossible to fill. It’s tough to picture the department without Mike. For me, the two have become synonymous.

Saying goodbye to Mike is a bittersweet time for us. His steady influence and quick wit will certainly be missed, but I for one am happy that he’ll have a chance to rest. He certainly deserves it. Still, I imagine that Mike wouldn’t be happy unless he had something to tinker with. Just now it will be a hobby and not some student’s research, and that will certainly be our loss.

Good luck Mike, enjoy your retirement, and thanks for everything. I think that I speak for everyone in the department when I say that you’ll be missed.
Mike, the Expediter of My Dreams

Rick B. Watson
(graduate student)

When I was a small child I used to dream of becoming a “Mr. Fix-it” kind of guy. I had a junior size tool belt and would work on things like hammering little plastic nails in, tightening bolts, and measuring things with my tape measure. As a researcher, I’m able to fulfill some of those childhood dreams. In my work here it seems that there is always something breaking down or some part that needs replacing. Mike Kukla has been much more than just a mentor and a role model for me to become the handy, Mr. Fix-it I’ve always wanted to be.

I always try to repair or fix things myself here. However, when there is a problem that seems impossible, I know that Mike will offer the best solution in the shortest amount of time. Could it be his limitless patience, calmness, or undeniable skill that makes him so efficient? There were times when no clear answer would be apparent to me, but with Mike’s systematic approach to solving problems we always found an acceptable solution. When I’m capable, he lets me perform the work with complete confidence. Mike isn’t the type of guy to hang over your shoulder to criticize your efforts, even though he certainly could have with me so many times.

Mike has made me come so close to my goal of being Mr. Fix-it. Mike has taught me things that I could have never learned in a classroom (patience, ingenuity, problem solving, and knowledge of tools) and for that I’ll always be grateful. If I could be like Mike, man, the things I could accomplish. After Mike leaves I will try to tackle my problems in the way that Mike does, with patience, humor, and confidence.

I have a feeling that Mike’s work will not be finished after he leaves. I can picture his wife saying “Mike the plumbing is leaking.”, “Why doesn’t the air conditioner work?”, or “What’s wrong with the car?”. Hasta la Vista Mike, all of us (and our research) will miss you very much.

p.s. Can we call you at home if we need to?
Godspeed Mike

Jose Garcia
(graduate student)

What to say about Mr. Kukla? I just find it amazing how many different hats he was worn in this department. I have always known Mike as the omniscient member of this department. A man revered and respected not only for his technical skills but also for his great stories about the department and his wry wit. Like most students, my first meeting with Mike was for the infamous picture-taking ordeal (Mike, I think you may have a great career ahead of you with the DMV. Just an idea). It is pretty impressive how many different shades of blue (?) he has been able to get out of the same background. Over the years, though, I found out that he does more than just take pictures, he fixes: pumps, thermocouples, pressure transducers, data boards, computers, VCR’s, cameras, A/C’s, door locks, and list goes on. So, needless to say, getting to know Mike has been really important for my research. More than that, however, Mike has been a great friend, always cheering everyone up, cracking up a joke when you least expected it. Now, as we near the end of an era, with his retirement quickly approaching, I would like to share a few comments with Mike:

- Did you report your income from coffee in your tax return?
- Keep your left arm straight when you take the club back, your head leveled, and don’t drop your shoulders during the swing.
- If you need any tips about visiting Brazil, Chile, or Argentina, just let me know.
- Speaking of Argentina, it turns out that you can find spare parts for the Falcon over there. It was a very popular car and there are quite a few still running over there.
- Finally, please have the injection molding machine running before you leave.

Maybe the technical expertise will be eventually replaced, but the friendship, the stories, and the humor will surely be missed. Thank you Mike for everything you have taught me...

Godspeed, Mike!
The Most Helpful Person for Everyone in our Department

The trouble-makers from the fluids group

Yang Zhao (Postdoc Research Associate),
Kristina M. Bailey (graduate student)
and Lee Richards (graduate student)

Some of us in the fluids group have known Mike for many years, some of us just a few. It is hard for us to express in just a few words how his willingness to share his knowledge has benefited our group and this department.

Of course, many would say that it was his job; however, we do not think that there will be anyone who can fill Mike's shoes. Believe this or not, we shall soon find out. Thank you Mike for your dedication to our department. We will always think of you when we run into "trouble". :) 

Fond thoughts and wishing you the best in retirement.

We will deeply miss you, Mike. We wrote our sincere thanks to you in English, Hindi, Indonesian/Malaysian, Vietnamese, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Turkish, Chinese, Portuguese, and Arabic.

Happy Retirement, Mike!

We will miss you, Mike!

माझ्याकडून आपणच्या मुळ येथे रूढीला दिलीला
Kita akan rindu sama mu, Mike
Ching tāi nu’ bān , Mike
Te extrañaremos, Mike
マイクさん、今でであらためてございます。
마이크, 진심으로 감사드립니다.
Mike, seni özleyeceğiz...
我们会想念您的，麦克！
Obrigado por tudo, Mike！
حِنْفَتْلَهُ يَا مَايْكَ