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45 Years of Service with Mike Collins

Mike Collins has achieved 45 years of service at Americhem by moving his way up from working in production to the quality department to where he is today as Project Coordinator for Building & Construction out of Headquarters. He was hired on September 13, 1976, 12 days after his 18th birthday. During the thriving economy of 1976, Americhem made major expansions by hiring many new employees. Mike's neighbor saw that the company was hiring and recommended him for the job.

To celebrate Americhem's 80 year anniversary, Mike was kind enough to be interviewed as one of Americhem's longest tenured employees. The dialogue was as follows:

What was the field of plastics like when you first started?

Everything was a lot dirtier and much more manual. We were still using old mechanical scales at the time and PC's weren't even a thing. When I first started, we were producing products with laboratory sized rubber processing machines; now we have large industrial twin screw extruders among other advanced machinery.

What were some of the biggest challenges back then?

Acclimating to a manufacturing environment was a major challenge for me. The cleanup process was so extensive with all of the pigments we were using; by the end of our shifts, we'd all look like different colored Smurfs depending on what color you were running that day. We used to get an allocated "shower time" every day to go scrub off all the pigment before going home.

What changes have you seen in plastics?

Processes have improved, technology has advanced, and Americhem has innovated so many new products as we expanded into more and more new markets. We are still in business today because we have always been willing to learn and grow as the industry pushed on.



Picture 1: Mike Collins dressed up for Halloween.

What have been the greatest developments in the field of plastics over the last 45 years?

I've seen some of the greatest developments in the bottling industry. The speed to process, the automation, and the new materials that are constantly evolving have been incredible. One of the coolest production experiences I've had is when I went to one of our bottle customer's facilities and saw their highly advanced machines producing millions of bottles daily.

From your perspective, what would you say are Americhem's greatest accomplishments?

Continuous improvement, making adjustments when needed, and challenging the status quo. They used to start company meetings by saying, "We are in the business of making a profit, but it's carefully balanced with taking care of our employees." If we didn't have both of those, none of us would be having these conversations right now about how long we've all worked here.

In your opinion, is there anything that Americhem should have done differently?

We used to have an internal “green team” and I think that as the industry continues to push towards sustainability, we should look into realigning this team.

What are some of your fondest Americhem memories?

It will always center on the people for me. That’s why I liked doing corporate training and going out to see customers. Many of my closest lifelong friends are people who I have worked with. We have known each other and raised our families together over decades. We are so much more than just coworkers.

What are the key issues that you see Americhem addressing in the future?

I think a major issue that will be addressed is what I mentioned in my previous answer: sustainability. We will have to keep pushing this initiative forward from the top down as our industry, customers, and consumers are demanding it from us.

Please share one memory of a funny situation that you encountered at Americhem.

Well, there were plenty of pranks, that’s for sure. If it was your birthday or work anniversary, you knew that you’d probably get thrown in the dip tank, which was just a tub of cold water for cooling materials. Or we’d ask people to go get something from the basement... of course, we didn’t have a basement. Sometimes people would bring live fish in and throw them in the dip tank to freak people out. One time, someone actually threw one in that was too big and it got stuck in there.



Picture 2: Mike Collins (far right) with colleagues at a corporate team-building event.

Describe what Americhem means to you.

Americhem has provided me with the opportunity for personal growth, learning, creating lifelong friendships, providing for my family, and stability in my life that I might not have had otherwise. Those opportunities have been provided by Americhem and I am a better man today as a result of it.

Thank you Mike for your endless commitment to Americhem and your timeless friendship to many of us. We wish you continued success in your long standing career and look forward to your ongoing positivity you spread across the company.