

Fred Blackman Celebrates 50 Years with Peening Technologies

IN THE SHOT PEENING BUSINESS, only a handful of things have lasted for 50 years: Almen strips, Almen gages, Almen blocks—and Fred Blackman.

Peening Technologies of Connecticut employee Wilfred “Fred” Blackman marked a major milestone this year, celebrating 50 years with the company. A native of St. Philip, Barbados, he began working at Peening Technologies, known then as Hydro-Honing Laboratories, in 1967. He had come to Hartford, Connecticut because his sister lived there, and just two weeks after arriving landed a job with the fledgling company. Blackman was one of the first employees in Hydro-Honing Laboratories’ South Windsor location, liked the job, and decided to stay. He became a US citizen in 1981 and now resides in Bloomfield, Connecticut.

An energetic 73-year-old, with a wicked sense of humor, Blackman recalled his early days with the company. “Coming to the US to work was a big deal,” he said. “When I started working at Hydro-Honing, it was, as the saying goes, just a hole in the wall in South Windsor. We had three operators, and the equipment used for shot peening had been built on-site, both automated and manual. It was a far cry from what we build today.”

As the company grew, moving from South Windsor to its present location in East Hartford, Blackman worked side-by-side with Walter A. Beach Sr., then the company President. “We were working on Mack Truck axles and spindles,” he recalled. “When the others went home, I stayed to work with Mr. Beach. People thought I was part owner of the company, I was there so much.”

Starting as a machine operator, Blackman rose through the ranks to become Lead Man, Foreman, Plant Manager, Inspector, and then Chief Inspector before leaving the job shop side of the business in 2010 to help launch Peening Technologies Equipment Company. Along the way he earned his FAA Repairman credentials and qualified as a Category H



Fred Blackman has been with Peening Technologies for 50 years.

Inspector for Sikorsky. “I’m not sure what my title is now,” he said. “I’m the last of the original employees. The others have retired or passed away.”

One of his first production jobs was peening automobile universal joints, something the company no longer does. He could not have imagined he would one day be inspecting the peening on parts for NASA’s Space Shuttle (the company peened Pratt & Whitney’s shuttle Turbopumps). In between, he has worked on everything from jet engine parts to oil exploration equipment, and at one time or another he worked in almost every area of the company. “I even had training in electronics, I was the electrician here for a while, I was also the company carpenter for a while. I’ve done a little bit of everything.”

For a number of years, Blackman was responsible for a dedicated, 80 foot-long machine that shot peened 32 foot-long drill pipes (ID and OD) used for oil and gas exploration. Eventually, the customer purchased the machine from Peening Technologies and moved the line back in-house, relying on Blackman to smooth the transition. Once the machinery was set up, they turned to him to train their own employees. “They sent a private car and a plane for me,” he said, “That was something.”

Blackman has seen the business change dramatically over the five decades he has spent with Peening Technologies. “The biggest change is the robotic machines,” he said. “At the beginning, there were no computers, and only a little automation. Back then we did commercial work and manually peened parts. Now everything is automated.” He described the shift to computerized equipment as “a happy transition,” making the jobs less physically stressful. He is now a key player on the team that builds shot peening machines from the ground up for outside customers.

Over the years, Blackman has become indispensable to the company. Peening Technologies President Tom Beach recalls his late father, Walter Beach Sr., telling him bluntly that if things got tough for the company financially, “you’ll be laid off before Fred will.”

“Happily, that didn’t happen,” Beach joked. “I’ve known Fred my whole life. I started working for my Dad summers as a teenager, and Fred was my boss. He has been a friend, a mentor, always more than just an employee. He is still my go-to guy when there’s a problem. He’s wise, experienced, he



Shot Peening
NDT

Mass Media Finishing
Aerospace, Military & Commercial Approvals

FAA Repair Stations
KJ1R272K (CT) & G89R878X (GA)

On-site Capabilities



Surface Enhancement (CT & GA)
Nondestructive Testing (GA)

peentech.com

8 Eastern Park Road
East Hartford, CT 06108
860-289-4328

3117 Emery Circle
Austell, GA 30168
770-941-9573

Established 1966

doesn't give up. I'm thrilled he's working with me to build our newest machines."

Walter Beach, Jr., added, "When I was a teenager our father also had me work with Fred. He told me, "Fred can tell you everything there is to know about shot peening," and he was right. Fred is one of the hardest working people I've ever known."

"I like the people," said Blackman. "There are great memories and great respect here. I'm dedicated to this company. I've never wanted to go anywhere else, so I just decided to stay. I could go another fifty years with the kids."

Three other employees, Roberto Colon, Sr., Jesus Torres, and Tomas Perez, have reached or surpassed the 40-year mark with the company, but only Blackman can boast 50. And he has no plans to retire any time soon. "As long as I've got my health," he said with a shrug, "I'm not going anywhere." ●



For a number of years, Blackman was responsible for a dedicated, 80 foot-long machine that shot peened 32 foot-long drill pipes (ID and OD) used for oil and gas exploration.



Peening Technologies has several employees that have been with the company for many years. From left to right: Tomas Perez (40 years), Fred Blackman (50 years), Roberto Colon (40 years) and Jesus Torres (40 years).