

A Y-12 legacy: Employee's work provides for his family after his death

By: D. Ray Smith | **Historically Speaking** | The Oak Ridger | April 8, 2008

As is often the case, Chuck Egert, a Y-12 employee, rarely talked to his family about his job. The reasons for this are fully understood and appreciated by Y-12 workers and almost never understood by the family. However, the families grow accustomed to the fact and usually just accept that as the way things are going to be.

The story I am bringing you today is written by Lisa Xiques (pronounced with an "H" sound for the "X" and thus is phonetically "Hickus," which is of Basque origin). She works in the Public Affairs and Communications group at Y-12. She is a writer and editor there. Lisa wrote a shorter version of this story for our internal electronic news medium, Y-source.

Thinking the story deserved a wider audience, she asked if I would like to include it in **Historically Speaking**. I am pleased to do so as I think the message is one that all families of Y-12 workers need to understand and appreciate.

In Chuck's case, he was fortunate enough to do something while working at Y-12 that is continuing to help his family well after his untimely death. Several years ago he was granted a patent for work done at Y-12. Today his family continues to benefit from that action taken over 10 years ago.

Read Lisa's story and appreciate Chuck Egert through his family's eyes.

Chuck Egert of the Technology Development Division died in 1998 at the age of 45, leaving his wife, Mary Beth, and two sons, Nicholas and Jonathan. He also left a legacy that neither he nor his family expected. In 1997, Egert received a U.S. patent for a coating that is used at Y-12 to extend the life of equipment. He also received four other patents, as well as two R&D awards.

His wife, Mary Beth, didn't know much about his patents while he was alive. It was all part of his job, and he was analytical and matter of fact about what he did. It sometimes takes years for patents to go through, and Chuck wasn't one to talk about his accomplishments. Mary Beth knew more about what he did after his death than before.

When he passed away, the close-knit family managed with Mary Beth's job as a dental hygienist, but still there were loans for college and all the expenses involved with being a single mom raising two sons.

After BWXT Y-12 took over the Managing & Operating contract at Y-12, Mary Beth was contacted by Y-12 staff to arrange for royalty payments to go to the family. A trust was set up for royalties, and the Egerts were grateful to continue to benefit from Chuck's work at Y-12.

The royalty checks helped make ends meet. Mary Beth remembers a time when her heating system went out, and a check appeared in the mail just in time to help with the extra expense. Mary Beth said, "Chuck never knew he would still be taking care of us."

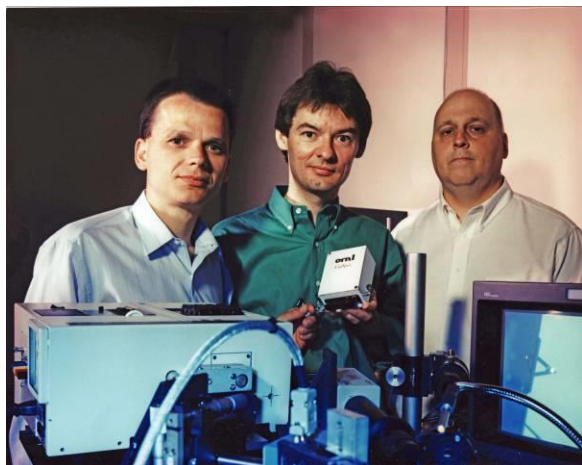
But this past November (more than nine years after Chuck's death), Michael Moore, the accountant who handled royalties, and Tammy Graham, of Technology Transfer, called Mary Beth to give her some surprising good news. Because of a dispute resolution, they were sending a substantial windfall check to catch up on royalties — in an amount that Mary Beth had never imagined would come her way. "I was so dumbfounded," she said. "I just couldn't believe it."

The money was an unexpected blessing, and Mary Beth credits B&W Y-12 with "doing the right thing." "If they had not contacted me, I would have never known," she said.

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Receiving the royalties made a big difference in their lives — not just financially. Mary Beth said it helped her boys know their dad better because it gave them a clearer understanding of him as a professional and a scientist. Getting the support from the royalties “gave a little piece of their dad back.”



From left are Panos Datskos, Slo Rajic and Chuck Egert

She said that her husband loved his work. Slo Rajic, an Oak Ridge National Laboratory associate of Chuck's, remembers that when he joined ORNL just out of graduate school, Chuck was there for him as a senior adviser, mentor, and friend. They worked together on a project to develop optics for the military. Another intern remembers him as a practical, no-nonsense friend who always got right to the point. Mary Beth noted, “He didn't make a lot of small talk.”

He was a firm believer in education, often working with his sons and other students on science projects. He wanted to instill a love of science and math in students and volunteered his time for school science fairs and competitions.

He would tell others, Mary Beth said, to keep working, keep asking questions, keep thinking outside the box, keep pushing yourself to be creative and active.

His sons have followed his advice: Nicholas and his wife, Selena, now live in Milwaukee where he practices law. Jonathan is a senior at Purdue University and is planning for graduate school. Mary Beth urges other families with patents to modify their wills and set up trusts now. She had to go back to probate Chuck's will, a process that took a lot of time.

Chuck Egert never knew he was leaving such a legacy, but Mary Beth is sure he would be modest yet proud of this accomplishment. Patents can provide a long-term benefit not only to the company and the technologies they support, but also to the families of inventors and researchers.

Chuck Egert's memory is kept alive through his contributions at home and at Y-12, and also through his continued contribution to his family's well-being.

— by Lisa Xiques

The message here is one that many Y-12 workers should hear and apply to their family planning strategy. Chuck did not waste time. He is remembered as a “practical, no-nonsense friend” and someone who “kept asking questions.” He was also described as someone who understood the importance of science projects for the young.

While Chuck did not live to see his children grow up, his Y-12 legacy has contributed over the years to their well being. We can all benefit from his example of doing what we can to the best of our abilities and thinking ahead when opportunities come our way.

I hope you enjoyed Lisa's efforts to bring Chuck Egert's story to the readers of Historically Speaking.