

## Machinist Ends 57-Year Career

**By Marcia Blomberg**

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SPRINGFIELD - For most people, retiring after 57 years of work would require them to have launched their careers when they were about 8. Not Earle W. Ingalls. He started working at Mitchell Machine when he was 21. It was September 1945, the dawn of the atomic age, just one month after the U.S. dropped the first nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end World War II. Now they're talking about putting defense systems into space to shoot down nuclear missiles.

Ingalls finally retired yesterday, at the age of 78. At a surprise catered lunch served in the Hancock Street machine shop, Ingalls chatted with co-workers and some friends who had retired before him (all of them younger, too). Ingalls, a compact man with cropped gray hair, clear eyes and concise replies, said yesterday he finally decided to hang up his blue shop jacket because "it's time to retire. My wife (Lorraine) has plenty of work for me." She has a list of projects for him to do around the house and yard, starting with the kitchen cabinets and a new kitchen floor, he said.

"Talk about a busman's holiday," remarked Frank R. Mitchell, vice president of Mitchell Machine. Why wait until 78 to retire? "I don't know, I just enjoyed working," Ingalls said yesterday. "It never entered my mind about stopping."

For 25 years, he worked primarily on a horizontal boring machine. Drilling precise holes in the precise right spot in a piece of metal pleased him, he said, "just because it was fussy work, close work." He admits to being detail-oriented.

During a recent vacation, Ingalls came in to the shop to machine new countertops for his kitchen, to make sure they fit as precisely as possible, said President John M. "Jack" Mitchell.

Ingalls was hired by Mitchell's grandfather to work on a jig boring machine that was scheduled to arrive the next day, Sept. 10, 1945. With the end of the war, Ingalls and many others had been laid off from the former Springfield Armory, soldiers were coming home, and jobs were scarce. Ingalls had just undergone a four-year program at the Armory that was so intensive, with college-level math courses, that it was probably the equivalent of an engineering degree, Jack Mitchell said. After graduating from Technical High School, Ingalls said he could have gone straight into a machine shop and made \$1.50 an hour at that time, but he chose the apprenticeship, at 30 cents an hour, because he wanted to learn more.

When he started at Mitchell Machine, running a jig boring machine, he got 90 cents an hour, "and that was quite a raise." He took home \$34 a week, but his rent was only \$32 a month, he recalled.

Mitchell Machine makes the machinery that other manufacturers use to make things. Ingalls helped build a blow-molding machine used by Monsanto to make soda bottles, and another machine that made molded fiber egg boxes. The company has made machines used in processing silicon wafers, and is currently building an automatic buffing machine, of its own design, to polish metal parts.

A 57-year-career spans nearly a lifetime of changes, especially in a technology-driven industry like metal machining. "All the machines were probably belt-driven" when Ingalls started, Jack Mitchell said. "There's a real history of the industry in one individual." The advent of computerized machines, that with the input of

some numbers can calculate exactly where to cut into a piece of metal, is the biggest change, of course, Ingalls said. "They save you a lot of work," he said. But "every now and then I'll take and check something on the computer with the old trig (trigonometry) method," he said.

Jack Mitchell said that the company will ask Ingalls to come back and do some consulting work on occasion. Ingalls said he's not much of a traveler, but when he's not working on the list of house projects in his retirement, he'll likely do some woodworking and get his set of five model trains in the basement running again.

A stickler for doing things the right way, Ingalls stayed until his shift ended at 3:30 p.m. yesterday, even though he could have left anytime after the surprise luncheon sprung on him by the Mitchell brothers. "He still has a very old-fashioned work ethic," Frank Mitchell pointed out.

Earle W. Ingalls, center, talks with Jack M. Mitchell, left, president of Mitchell Machine, and Frank R. Mitchell, vice president, in the Springfield company's assembly bay following a surprise retirement luncheon yesterday for Ingalls.