

Tom Filesi Biography

Hi to my Motorola friends and co-workers of long ago! I had 21 years at Motorola, but only 4 of those years were at Austin. It was 1984 to 1988. We packed a lot of living into that relatively short time. I hope all of yours was as good or better memories.

I am a first-generation American, from Immigrant Italian families. I went to work part-time after school and weekends, when I was 16, doing automobile seat covers. I have never been unemployed since then, until I retired at 65. I answered an Ad from the Paper when I was old enough (18) to work in a factory. I had no experience, but I became a Quality Control Technician, overnight, in a paint factory.

Three years later I was a paint formulator. I learned a lot from my bosses, and set my goal to have my own Lab, and make \$10k per year, which at that time was all the money in the world. I quickly found out that I needed a technical college degree to make that happen. I lived in Baltimore, Maryland, home of Johns Hopkins University, and they had evening Engineering degree programs. I made it a criteria for my next three jobs, over an 8 year period to get my employers to pay my tuition. I graduated with a BS in Chemical Engineering in 1964.

In the next two years I had achieved my earlier goals, I was Technical Director of a paint company, but at age 28 I had “topped out” and I left the Coatings Industry. I answered another Ad from the Baltimore Sunpapers, for Westinghouse as an Engineer in Micro Electronics, a completely new industry making Integrated Circuits.

Like many large Electronics companies of that time (1965), Westinghouse discovered that though it was cool to be a Manufacturer of Integrated Circuits, it consumed a ton of cash, with a very small return. They withdrew from the Commercial IC Market, and folded what remained into their Defense Division. That was 1968, and my boss and I were the last ones there, to shut the doors. I didn't dig working in a Union shop, so in 1970 I joined some of my Westinghouse buddies at Motorola, in Mesa AZ.

My first task at Motorola was to move Linear (Analog) Wafer Production from 52nd St. to Mesa, where I became the Fab Manager. At that time MOS IC Wafer production was moved from 52nd St. to Austin, TX. I had nothing to do with that. At Mesa I remained in the Linear Manufacturing area for the next 6 years where I met and later married the love of my life, Margy Kircher. Just before our wedding, I followed my boss, Wayne Pearson back to 52nd St, to the Silicon Wafer Manufacturing area as Director of Epi Wafer manufacturing. During the next 8 years, I gradually had the opportunity to take over all of Silicon wafer Operations from Poly Silicon through finished, Polished Wafers.

Motorola didn't belong in the Silicon wafer manufacturing business; we made Discretes and ICs. It was acted on years later when Motorola shut down the Materials area. I began to feel as though there was a sign hanging around my neck that read “Silicon Materials Only.” There's a thing about Management: “If it ain't broke, don't fix it!” If you do a good job, they keep you there. Anyhow, I managed to escape from Materials in 1984 and go to Austin to manage MOS 8 which at that time was sorta' coming out of engineering and moving toward production. I helped it along, but my best and toughest customer, Gary Daniels wasn't getting what he wanted and needed from MOS-8. So, Bill Walker was better prepared than I to lead MOS-8 to the fab it was meant to be. So we swapped Fabs and I took over MOS-2. I congratulate Bill for the job he did with MOS-8 and his leadership for his job to come as VP of Die production.

We had a fire in MOS-2 when the regulator on a Silane tank failed on a Saturday afternoon. I found out when I was at home, changing the oil in my car. We were shut down for 6 weeks. It was critical to be able to prove low (at the time it was very low) particle size and quantity on the finished wafer, to avoid a much longer shut down to run operating life for several custom products in MOS-2. One of those products was a part for the engine of new GM Corvettes. I heard later that they had a bunch of those cars sitting in a lot until we got back into production, and shipped those parts.

But strangely enough, a lot of good came out of that incident. Our engineering search by our guys, led by John Dahm, to significantly reduce particulates, resulted in MOS-2 becoming one of our best performing fabs in the Motorola system. Added to that was our Pilot Project for Cycle Time reduction which reduced the time to produce our product, while reducing our WIP Inventory by about one Million Dollars. It was fun!

I want to pause here to give a tremendous amount of credit and gratitude to Bob Galvin for what he did for the Motorola employees and our customers over my 21 years at Motorola. He treated us like family and generously supported our ideas and our products. That may have contributed to what Motorola is today: he may have supported too much! He allowed us to make a great deal of electronic products, but we seldom survived with our products with the latest technology to take it to the finish line where it meant the most.

I mean to say that I owe a great deal of humble thanks to the emphasis on training and education opportunities that Mr. Galvin espoused for our middle-management that trained all of us how to be General Managers. He knew that there were only a few job openings at Motorola at that level, which would likely result in the exodus of many so-trained people. Now look at Silicon Valley and the whole of Semiconductor Technology, and you will find many of the leaders came from Motorola. I thank Bob Galvin for that.

I returned to Phoenix, 52nd St. in 1988. I had several jobs in Discretes, but again I was topped out. Well trained, but no job. So, early in 1991, I took an early-out retirement deal after responding to a Head Hunter for a very risky job in Carrollton Texas, as President & COO of Optek Technology, a company on the brink of Chapter 11. The Head Hunter came to me as the recommendation of an Optek employee, Tom Garrett, who worked for me at Motorola, in Austin. The rest is history. Optek stock was as low as a quarter, and I got a lot of stock-options, virtually worthless at the time. I cleaned house (my Staff), and with Tom Garrett as my VP of Operations, we reduced locations and headcount, automated manufacturing, over the period of a few years. We eliminated our \$37 Million debt and put \$22 million in Savings in the Bank. Along the way I was selected as Entrepreneur of the Year for the Southwest US, by Ernst & Young, in the Turn-around category in 1996. My predecessor in that category was Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys.

We generated attention on Wall St. and in 1999, we sold the company to a private Investment firm, and Optek's 8 million total shares sold for \$25.50 each, for a total of \$200 Million. I owned 5% of the Company. You do the math. I stayed with the new owner about a year and retired the next year on my 65th birthday, in 2000. I have worked with charitable Institutions as a volunteer ever since, including SCORE for the last 14 years. Margy and I have 5 kids, 11 Grandkids, and 12 Great-grandkids, and we're happily still counting!