



Bill Tarutis | For NEPA Energy Journal
Former radio personality Dale Mikolaczyk, left, says it's Linde Corp. veterans like site superintendent Jerry Corrigan, right, who help sustain the company with a solid work ethic, attention to detail and concern for fellow crew members.

The right place at the right time

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Dale Mikolaczyk
may be the industry's
most interesting man

You might know him better as Rusty Fender.

And oldies music fans know him as Shadoe Steele.

Nowadays most of his colleagues at Linde Corp. just call him Dale, and they know him by his orange hardhat and wide grin rather than his snappy radio voice.

Dale Mikolaczyk, of radio fame for the 26 years he went by pseudonyms for

Pittston-based WKRZ radio station and others, last year made the kind of career move fitting for a kid in his late 20s.

But at 58, Mikolaczyk finds he is fitting in as a field engineer for Linde, a pipeline-building firm headquartered in Pittston Township.

But before you drop your day job for a promising career in pipeline engineering like his, there's a little more to his story, including an extensive background that has nothing to do with media.

ENGINEERING BACKGROUND

Mikolaczyk went to the University of Scranton and Duke University. He holds a degree in aerospace systems engineering and a master's degree in electrical engineering.

He started his career as a production

engineer at WBRE-TV in Wilkes-Barre overseeing the technical side of the daily news, but soon he was called up to the local affiliate's national network, NBC in New York City.

At 23 years old, the Duryea native was controlling NBC's 36 satellites, orbiting thousands of miles above the surface of the earth.

Using remote controls, Mikolaczyk, along with his team, operated thrusters attached to the satellites to keep them inside what he called a 40-cubic-mile box, or 2 longitudinal degrees. If a satellite

LINDE CORP.

Started in 1979 by
Scott Linde as a
utility contractor.

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Mikolaczyk

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drifted outside its box, it could result in signal loss for customers, or worse.

"They've had satellites what you call walk into graveyard orbit," Mikolaczyk said. "That's a \$2 billion loss," he said, explaining further that trillions of dollars were at stake because each satellite handled up to 80 channels, many of which represented multi-billion dollar contracts.

Aerospace technology has changed dramatically since then, and there's no longer scores of engineers guiding satellites from earth.

"Now it's handled by a couple of \$400 Dell computers," Mikolaczyk said shrugging.

HOME HEARKENS

Even while he worked in New York City, he found he was spending a lot of cash commuting from his home in the Philadelphia suburbs, and the high cost of living in the name of an exhilarating career was growing.

"You make huge money in the big city, but you pay it all out," he said. "I paid more in taxes every year than my salary ever was at the radio station."

He had been traveling to the Wyoming Valley every weekend to host the long-running highly-rated "Saturday Night Live at the Oldies with Shadoe Steele," and when KRZ proposed to break new ground in 1990 with the region's first-ever live-from-the-sky traffic reporting, Mikolaczyk was all in.

The station sought sponsors to lease aircraft, but, in hindsight, the program was doomed from the start, he said.

"It was even a money-loser in those days," Mikolaczyk said. "I think we used to make \$300 in the morning and spend \$400 to fly."

The program took a nosedive not long after it started, but Mikolaczyk stayed with the station to provide daily traffic updates as Rusty Fender for the next decade, and playing host for the Saturday night oldies show.

It was February last year when KRZ's owner, Entercom Communications, decided to drop Rusty Fender and the oldies show.

But it was his radio job that helped lay the groundwork for his current job.

What some might perceive as an abysmal circumstance — a work schedule that allowed for about three hours of sleep each night — turned out to be the thing that kept him sharp and prepared him for a massive career switch.

"It's funny how things work out in life, because I never wanted to teach," Mikolaczyk said. "But because of that horrible, awful, terrible shift, the split shift I had at the radio station ... in between that window, I had about six hours that I would teach either two, three or four courses at Wilkes University."

Teaching a few science and engineering



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Before drillers enter the well pad, welders install piping to carry gas that will be harvested from the Friedland Farms well pad in Lenox Township, Susquehanna County.

classes each year kept him connected with the latest technology trends, the promise for work in the industry and folks who already were working in it every day.

NEW GIG

At the Friedland Farms well pad in Lenox Township, Susquehanna County, one of Mikolaczyk's latest projects, he watched intently as an excavator operator started on a pipe trench making way for new a new connection line that will carry gas away from the well to compressor station.

The site foreman, near-20-year Linde veteran Jerry Corrigan, hiked up the slope to greet his colleague.

Mikolaczyk said it's guys like Corrigan who make Linde such a terrific place to work.

Look around you, he said, you don't see a bunch of scruffy kids driving these machines, he said, These are seasoned workers, the best in their field.

"You gotta want to," Corrigan said. "If you're not here to work, then don't come in."

Leaving Corrigan to oversee his crew, Mikolaczyk walked along the pipeline right where it hugged a treeline on the edge of expansive farmland. He nodded a greeting toward a team of welders connecting pieces of piping together. Stepping out into the open air after 26 years at a desk was one of his greatest changes, he said.

"I went from working in New York where, you know, the smell of the day was souvlaki and chestnuts to the smell of diesel fuel and cow manure," Mikolaczyk said letting out a belly laugh. "That's been the biggest change in my career."

GULF SPILL FIXER

It was late one evening in 2010 when Mikolaczyk was sitting on the couch watching TV coverage of BP's Deepwater Horizon oil spill. His longtime girlfriend, Barbara Aversa, suggested he submit a solution to stop the free-flowing gusher of oil a mile below the surface.

It was his suggestion to use a locking plug on the leaking borehole that allowed crews to slow the flow to a trickle, enough to apply the "static kill," a combination of mud and cement that ultimately stopped the massive leak, he said.

The local headlines gave the man mostly known for his radio presence a good dose of credibility that his knowledge base spreads much further than flying satellites and watching traffic trends.

And his experience with the TV networks gave him the confidence that he could successfully map out hundreds of miles of gas pipes to carry gas from well to main pipeline.

"Nothing more is complicated than me flying satellites in ionospheric orbit for 20 years over the equator, you know, 22,397.5 miles up," Mikolaczyk said. "But this is a complicated business; it really is."

Now the former radio man spends his days working side by side with guys like Corrigan to design pipelines where each mile demands careful consideration figuring effects on the environment, cost to the company and maintaining good gas flow.

"There's no book to go to for this job," he said. "We're writing it page by page as we go." ■