

Forget Horsepower, Toyota Indiana Plant Powered by People

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Over the past 20 years, Toyota Indiana has built 4.45 million vehicles. But it isn't the planning, engineering, problem solving or high-pace of the assembly line that stands out to Norm Bafunno, the plant's president. It's the people.

“My first day on the job as president, a team member came up to me and said she would like to talk about a policy the plant had. I thought to myself, ‘oh boy, what’s coming next.’ As it turns out, it wasn’t something she wanted changed that would benefit her, but, rather, she wanted to donate her vacation days to another team member whose son was sick and in the hospital. In a nutshell, that defines who we are.”

Today, the Princeton, Ind., plant celebrates 20 years of building vehicles. What started as the original plant to make the Tundra, now boasts the Sienna minivan, Sequoia full-size SUV and the Highlander and Highlander Hybrid midsize SUV. In addition to a celebration concert for team members in August and an open house planned for a later date, two local non-profit groups received Siennas to mark the anniversary.

These vehicle donations highlight Toyota's commitment to the future of mobility—getting more people to more places, on the road and in life. The Sienna minivans were given to Aurora Inc., an organization dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness in the community, and the Gibson County Counsel on Aging, a group that provides transportation to seniors in need.

“This minivan will help us make an impact in the lives of people right here in Gibson County by keeping them mobile,” said Michelle Fry, executive director, Gibson County Counsel on Aging. “Our service is the only way many of our seniors are able to get out to vital places such as the doctor, pharmacy and grocery store.”

Since groundbreaking for that original Tundra in 1996, the plant and its 5,000 team members have plenty to celebrate:

- \$4.3 billion investment in the operation
- 24,058 jobs in Indiana (including direct, intermediate and spin-off employment)
- 29 top vehicle picks by Consumer Reports
- 11 J.D. Power Initial Quality Awards and 16 J.D. Power Vehicle Dependability Awards
- 265,000 volunteer hours donated by team members and \$23 million in donations to area groups
- 3 expansions
- Exports of vehicles to 27 countries

“From the first Tundra produced to the current vehicle line-up, we are proud of the accomplishments of the Toyota Indiana team members,” said Osamu “Simon” Nagata, executive vice president and chief administrative officer of Toyota Motor North America, Inc. “It is clear the plant has a long and bright future ahead.”

Orvietta Shannon joined Toyota before the plant opened as a human resources specialist. It was through this role that she helped hire the original team and says it was, and still is, like a family. Twenty years later, Shannon works in Diversity and Inclusion and says TMMI's first class team is always thinking about how to improve the product.

“It really comes down to our culture,” Shannon said. “Our team members have a special pride in their work and you see it in everything they do. We talk about continuous improvement, and you see them constantly going above and beyond to make things better.”

Bafunno, who started at TMMI 19 ½ years ago as a general manager, said in addition to the dedicated team members, the plant's suppliers and community support played pivotal roles in helping the facility exceed expectations.

“Toyota Indiana has been a true community partner for twenty years,” said Lt. Governor Eric Holcomb. “They continue to make important local investments and provide a top-notch work environment for more than 5,000 Hoosiers, and we could not be more proud that they call Indiana home.”

And although TMMI has celebrated many milestones, team members say it was during the tough times that people saw Toyota’s true commitment to them. While idle for three months during the 2008 economic downturn, the plant kept all of its workers, setting up classrooms and teaching them skills needed for the future. Bafunno said those skills are still used today and help propel the plant forward. Team members were also given the option to volunteer at local non-profits and be paid by Toyota.

“Our team members’ capability to adapt and to learn and apply those skills each day has enabled those results to occur,” Bafunno says. “It not only helps establish a great reputation, but, also, really builds a bridge to the future.”