



Letter from Japan

I'm writing after being fortunate enough to be invited by Mitsui-Seiki to see their Tokyo plant first-hand, as well as visit their customer Aikoku Alpha in Nagoya.

I found the Mitsui Seiki plant and its commitment to precision, a vision – figuratively and literally. The newest plant has been built according to Japan's strict environmental regulations and Mitsui's dedication to ultra-precision (around 12 microns true positioning capabilities) in their vertical and horizontal machining centers. The plant was built on a 1200 mm thick concrete "bed" in order to thwart environmental shifts, and maintains a 68 degree temperature throughout (at a cost of over \$75,000 a month!), with air circulating 24 times an hour for constant thermal stability. To complete their quest for the ultimate in accuracy, machines are virtually handmade. I witnessed "hand-scraping," where an employee's dedication to hand-scraping a perfect "fit" for achieving structural robustness (of up to 250 hours per machine) was an artistic dance as well as an exact science.

I asked about the employment climate in the manufacturing sector in Japan, and was told since the depression of the 1990s,

hiring has been very slow in manufacturing, though the industry is very strong. There is an age gap between 50 year-old experienced workers and the newer under 30 year-old workers. Their solution is to hire Chinese, Korean and Taiwanese in addition to their country's engineering talent. The current immigration laws are slowly opening up to allow that to happen. They look for a personality type willing to learn their technology and an interest to stay motivated throughout his career, then develop their talent. I was intrigued and moved by the intense personal focus by the employees and their tasks at hand, both at Mitsui-Seiki and Aikoku Alpha.

My letter would not be complete without mentioning the impeccable hosting by Scott Walker, president of Mitsui-Seiki U.S.A. (who speaks Japanese fluently, plays a mean guitar and understood my desire to soak in everything, including sushi for breakfast) and Lynn Gorman, president of Gorman Communications and my perfect partner-in-crime for donning kimonos at dinner, 6:00 a.m. fish markets and addiction to Japanese salt baths. I highly recommend Japan – and a Mitsui-Seiki tour!

Jill Sevelow

The Exodus

I read the "Future of Michigan" (February 2007): I remember the young ladies from Flint marrying out-of-state General Motors Institute students to get away from their blue collar life. I remember my exodus as a General Motors employee with a Masters of Science degree after being told they did not want that level of education working in the shops. I remember the exodus in Detroit of transient white and blue collar workers that continually stripped the city of a stable culture. I remember the exodus of employment opportunities for young people as the Big Three continued to lose their grasp of market share. Finally, on a business trip to the Detroit downtown, I saw the final sign of exodus – in a feeble attempt to put some color into otherwise drab surroundings, flowers planted the day before had been ripped from their beds and were dying in the street. Michigan needs a Lee Iacocca.

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We'd love to hear it.*