



The Power of Diversity

In preparing to write this article, I began to reflect on the experiences that shaped my outlook on Diversity. I grew up in Buffalo, New York at a time when the city was divided into various ethnic neighborhoods. As a youngster, I thought everyone had names similar to Kopinski, Chronik, Kolodziechek, Wardinski. It wasn't until high school that I started to realize the diverse make-up of the city.

In the Navy, I was exposed to a broader perspective of Diversity. I served on a cruiser that had a complement of approximately 1200 sailors and then on a destroyer that had a complement of 280 sailors. The sailors on these ships came from all around the United States. They were from the small towns and the big cities, the mountain areas and the beaches, the East coast and the West coast, the cold North and the sunny south. The quarters on a ship are very tight, so you got to know everyone fairly well and began to appreciate the uniqueness of each person's background.

I was also fortunate enough to travel quite extensively in the Navy. As we visited the various countries, there was a group of us that ventured into the local areas, in order to get a true taste of the country and the people. We sampled the different foods and tried to understand their customs. I found that if you showed an interest in learning their customs and treating the citizens with respect, they returned the hospitality tenfold.

When I graduated from college, I ended up in Columbia, South Carolina and continued moving south until I ended up in Tampa. Tampa introduced me to the Hispanic heritage. I quickly gained an appreciation and a taste for the food and a good cigar.

Two weeks ago, I took a trip back to Buffalo. Some things have changed and some have not. I attended the Eden Corn Festival and a concert in a park where everyone brought their lawn chairs to sit on. As I sat there listening to a German band called the "Frankfurters" (that really is their name), I thought about what a great country this is and how it is made up of a lot of diverse people, yet we are still all Americans.

I've come a long way since growing up in Buffalo, not only in miles but also in my appreciation for the diversity of people. It's not always easy to be open to someone with a different opinion or idea, but I've found that better decisions are made when everyone voices their opinion, whether we agree with it or not. That's the true power of diversity.

Tim Kasprzyk
Manager, Safety & Operational Training
TECO Peoples Gas

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