



The Barnett family's work in the steel industry goes back to 1909. Today, three family members work for ArcelorMittal: Tom, Danielle and Cliff. Tom's father, Clifford Charles Barnett (at right) was a railroad engineer and in the steel industry for 50 years.

STEEL INDUSTRY VETERANS

Barnett Line Goes Back to 1909

By Charlee Beasor

The Barnett family members quickly point out that they aren't all that unique in having had four generations work in the steel industry. They say it is more a by-product of living in a region dominated by the mills.

Three current ArcelorMittal employees are Tom and his children, Cliff and Danielle. But their heritage goes back much farther – to 1909 (they think), with two previous generations and various other relatives having worked in the mills throughout the years.

- Dad: **Tom Barnett** is the ArcelorMittal Indiana Harbor manager of environmental technology. He started working there in 1975
- Son: **Cliff Barnett** is senior environmental engineer for ArcelorMittal Burns Harbor; he's been in the role for over a year and previously worked at the ArcelorMittal Indiana Harbor Long Carbon plant (which is now closed) for four years
- Daughter: **Danielle Barnett** started in 2011 in the corporate purchasing department; earlier in 2016, she took on a new role as a plant buyer at Burns Harbor
- Grandfathers:
 - o **Cliff Barnett** (Tom's father) was a laborer and railroad engineer for 50 years (1935 to 1985) for United States Steel and Inland Steel
 - o **Matt Sobczak** (Tom's father-in-law) worked for United States Steel from 1940 to 1971

- Great-grandfathers:
 - o **Dan Toma** (Tom's maternal grandfather) was at the United States Steel coke plant from 1911 to 1955; he emigrated from Romania and lived to age 95
 - o **Matt Sobczak Sr.** (Matt Sobczak's father) worked for United States Steel from 1909 to 1940

BizVoice® sat down with the Barnetts recently at the Burns Harbor facility to ask about their history in the steel industry and how it has changed over the years.

BV: Was there any grand plan to have your children working for this company or industry too?

Tom: "I let them know about openings, but there was no master plan to do this. But jobs in the steel mills are good jobs. ... In the case of Cliff, we were desperate for somebody. They brought him over as a consultant, and after about a year they hired him. In the case of Danielle, things opened up, she applied and a week later she had a job."

BV: Your family goes back in the steel industry four generations. Is that a special legacy to carry on today?

Danielle: (pointing to her grandfather's hardhat). "I stole that from (dad) years ago and keep it in my office. My grandfather was a railroad engineer for Inland. You start realizing when you start talking to people out there, this isn't abnormal.

"Obviously the jobs have changed a bit from what my grandfather would have done. I sit in an office and do purchasing. In that scope, it's different. But there's a lot of people that have had previous generations working."

Tom: "People were proud and still are. We make a valuable product for America."

BV: How much of an influence did your father have on your career path?

Cliff: "It was a family environment. I think he's (Tom) now one of the older people in the office; all the rest are retired. Just growing up and seeing that. ... I think that's what moved me in that direction, to go in this field, the relationship he had with his co-workers and the family (atmosphere). I remember that as a kid."

Danielle: "They had Take Your Daughter to Work Day, and I went to work with Dad and he would actually put me to work. I remember doing some mathematical spreadsheet and he had me fact-check something. Everybody else was running around playing on the escalator. "At a very young age, I got to go through the hot mill and they

took us on tours and showed everything the plant did. And then you got to go play on the escalators and make note pads. There was a printing press in the main office building. ... Growing up with that, I was in first or second grade, and they did that whole, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' And I literally put down 'environmental engineer.' I spelled it wrong. I missed one of the 'n's. But growing up, he definitely had a lot of influence on me."

BV: What are some of the major differences between today's workplace and when you started in 1975, Tom?

Tom: When I left Purdue in '72, we used slide rules, and we didn't have calculators. ... The world started changing and we started getting answering machines and beepers and one day about 15 years ago, my boss was sending me emails and I said, 'I'm not at my desk,' and he said, 'Fine, get a Blackberry,' and I said 'Okay.'

"There's this march over time from a plant of around 25,000 people to a plant that has 5,000 people (today). We can't run without computers; back then we had no computers."

BV: Communication was very different than it is today, due in part to technological advances. How has that affected you in your jobs?

Cliff: "From 2011 to 2016, being an environmental engineer and manager, I had to interact a lot with the workers and managers in the plant. I definitely feel with emails and even texting, it evolved over the six years I was there. When I first got there, no one wanted to use email. By about 2013-2014, especially after the general manager announced you have to check your email, it was easier to communicate with people in the plant. It has even been evolving the last five years with technology. And again, you don't have as many workers, so you need to use the technology to run an efficient operation."

Tom: "But you have to go out in the plant. First, you do that; second, you use the phone. Sometimes email has its reasons to be used, and it makes sense. But most cases we're out all the time traveling and talking to people. It's winning the hearts and minds and they have so much else they have to do."

Cliff: "Technology makes everything run way better than it did in the past ... (but) you have to go out and actually make the workers and the shop managers understand that you are part of what they do too. It's a little old school, and a little new school."

BV: How often do you see each other at work?

Tom: "We haven't had a discussion on a company-related item in almost two years, (he says of Cliff)."

Cliff: "I've got my own people I ask questions to."

Danielle: "Now we're in different biospheres, even though we're working for the same company. When we were at Indiana Harbor (where Tom works), we got a lot more free lunches."

BV: Do you specifically try to avoid talking shop over the holidays

or when you're not working?

Tom: "We don't try to avoid it, but especially being at different plants now, we have somewhat different issues."

Danielle: "When we're together, I'm usually playing (with her nieces, Cliff's 3-year-old and 1-year-old daughters). I'm more involved with Play-Doh than in work."

BV: What would the previous generations say about you working here today?

Tom: "My dad, when I was working on my master's degree, he called me and told me they just formed an environmental department and there's a job opening. He was tickled to death to see me working at the mill. I think Matt (father-in-law) was not quite as enthusiastic. It could be a rough place. He worked at U.S. Steel, so I'm not sure what he would have said. I know that there were times he told me I should get the hell out of the mill."

Danielle: "Grandpa Sobczak would have been like, 'What the hell are you thinking?' Where Grandpa Barnett would have been like, 'Hey, this is cool!'"

Tom: "They both were proud of the fact that they made this

product and worked in the steel mills. And going back, I know my Grandpa Toma ... he thought it was a great thing to work in the mill. It made a living for him for 44 years."

Cliff: "Coming out of high school a little younger than you (Tom), that's where people wanted to work, the mill. That's where the good jobs were."

Danielle: "Didn't Mom even do a short stint here?"

Tom: "Yeah, she did. We did have her doing some secretarial work part-time. Auntie Shirley worked at Bethlehem, Uncle Larry worked at Bethlehem. Everybody worked at U.S. Steel, Bethlehem, Inland or LTV. Or you worked for somebody who supplied the mills or a contractor at the mill. ... It shot through the entire family."

Cliff: "It's just growing up in the area. That's where the jobs are. It's living here."

BV: Is there any sort of family tradition or initiation when someone in your family starts working here?

Tom: "I take 10% of their checks," he says with a chuckle. "No. We get together for lunch on a fairly regular basis."

Danielle: "It used to be weekly."

Tom: "And now I have to run out here (to Burns Harbor)."

Danielle: "When (Cliff) started at Long Carbon, I got him a polo and a congratulations card. When he got the official hire, I got him one of the ArcelorMittal polos. I was being a nice sister."

Tom: "When this first started, I don't know that we thought about it all that much. Even though it was out there all that time. That, 'Yeah, I work at the mill. Both grandfathers worked in the mills. Hey, wait a minute, both great-grandfathers worked in the mill.' But you never really dwelled on that. You just worked here."



Tom Barnett says a lot has changed since he started in the steel industry in 1975, much of it surrounding technology and communications.

