

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project
CCSU Student Author: Emily Oparowski
Subject: Phil Pearson
Company: Fafnir

“That’s One Small Step for a Man, One Giant Leap for Mankind”

Phil Pearson listened to his car radio on July 16, 1969, but he wasn’t humming along to the music of Elvis or the Beatles. He was listening to Neil Armstrong become the first man to walk on the moon. Unlike most Americans, Phil personally played a role in this event. In an interview, Armstrong praised the “hundreds of thousands” of people behind the project; one of whom is Phil Pearson.

Fafnir is credited for producing the bearings and gyroscopes that were used on the Apollo spacecraft in 1969. Phil’s responsibility at Fafnir included researching and developing the best possible ball bearing. This goal was only imaginable because “the company was very good at buying the latest and best equipment.” Like everyone that day, Phil was impressed. But as an engineer, he was more concerned when the spacecraft began its departure. He recalls the “HOORAY!” feeling when the device lifted off safely.

If Phil was not devoted to his job, it is highly likely that planes would fall out of the sky, buildings would collapse, and everyone would have starved to death because farm equipment wouldn’t work. If something could be done better at Fafnir, employees like Phil were encouraged to work together to do it. “At Fafnir, we would be criticized if we wrote a report and didn’t send it to everybody that was interested.” Fafnir employed thousands, created a thriving community, and contributed to history.