

# Business

## Iron man of Foamex

For 40 years, he's made it to work, immune to both sickness and snow

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Move over Cal Ripken, Jr. Make room for the Iron Man of Foamex, if you will.

Whether he's trudging through snow drifts on the way to work or being inducted into the Delaware County Hall of Fame for athletic achievement, friends, family and co-workers all seem to agree, Joe Iacono is a good sport.

And like the Baltimore Orioles standout who owns the Major League record for most consecutive games played, Iacono has set his own lofty mark for days on the job.

Co-workers at Foamex International Inc. at 1500 E. 2nd Street in Eddystone are celebrating his retirement, 40 years of nearly uninterrupted service and remembering a man who braved feet of snow on foot in a "state of emergency" in 1996 to make it in to work.

His wife Sheila said he walked an estimated 5 miles in the snow from their home in Woodlyn to the plant. Iacono, who has arthritis, was 58 at the time. He said the most challenging part of his snowy trek was getting out the front door. With the exception of a few snowed in employees left over from the third shift, he was the sole employee who made it to work that day.

"Joe started the foam machine up like a one man band," co-worker Hal Williams said. By the time he arrived at work, he joked, Iacono was a "200-pound block of ice" and had to be thawed out.

"I don't think they make people like him anymore," his wife Sheila said. She said she remembers telling him that no one else was going to work that day.

"Oh, yeah, well I try to be dependable," Iacono remarked casually. He said he comes to "work everyday on time" and tries to do his job to the best of his ability.

Foamex Executive Vice President Steve Drap said you could always count on his old Pontiac to be in the parking lot. With the exception of a knee replacement operation in 1997, a few family funerals and a military draft, Iacono left an unblemished attendance record. He said he has never really been sick.

"God gave me my health, and that's the main thing," he said "if you don't have your health, you don't have anything."

Bob Welsh, co-worker, said his 40 years with the com-



Times staff photo by PETER A. ZINNER

Joe Iacono, surrounded by co-workers, can kick back now that he is retired after spending 40 years at Foamex.

pany nearly encompasses the history of polyurethane foam. He said Iacono was one of the original employees at Broomall Street in Chester when Foamex was the foam division of Scott Paper Co. At the time of his retirement, he was one of the most senior employees.

"You're losing something when he retires," Welsh said. Co-worker Pat Abbott, who worked with Iacono for 35 years agreed. "Most companies have one or two. Joe was the best: good to work for, good to work with," he said.

Drap said he was "old school" but remarked on his ability to adapt to technical changes in the industry with ease. "Here's a guy who worked with a slide rule," he said, but was "as good as anyone at running that computer."

He described him as being available on nights and weekends, helping out when the plant was in a crunch. Longtime friend and co-worker Chuck Taylor indicated this "team-player" attitude was evident in his approach to sports as well.

He said he "had a lot of talent" but "wasn't trying to score a lot of points." He wanted to win, he said. "We kind of stunned everyone when we won the (Scott Paper Co. basketball) tournament two years in a row," he said.

Iacono, a pitcher, was inducted into the Chester High

School Hall of Fame and the Delaware County Hall of Fame for baseball. Friend Topper Corcoran called him "an outstanding athlete" in football, baseball, basketball and softball.

He said he was involved in local softball leagues for players over 30, 40 and 50 years until his knees gave out. Iacono's sister, Toni Conte, said he was "recognized for his baseball talent in the U.S. Army." Drafted in 1961, Iacono played on the Fort Devens traveling team.

Upon retirement, Iacono said he plans to go to Disney World with his family, to busy himself walking and to continue his involvement in MVP Sporting Goods in Aston, where he has been functioning as an "outside" sales rep.

Co-worker Sue DeGrave said he sells sports items out of the back of his car. "He always has a special deal for me," she said.

Could his sales pitch be a close second to his pitching arm?

Owner Lou Maroney, said Iacono brings in orders for goods and is well-known and liked by his customers. Maroney, who has known Iacono for 20 years, joked that if Iacono wants to work for him full time, he would want to see his resume and references.

## Spike in crude prices helps oil stocks, but could rattle market

NEW YORK (AP) — Like a trickle from a leaky barrel, the effects of rising oil prices spread far beyond the corner gas station.

This past week, shrinking oil supplies drove up the price of crude oil to its highest level in nine years. On Wall Street, shares of oil companies rose substantially, as did the oil services companies that build and maintain drilling rigs.

But while world oil ministers met in

London to discuss strategies for ending a global oil shortage, economists were considering whether a long-term rise in prices could be the factor that finally stirs inflation.

The answer: Not yet.

"In order for oil to have a real impact on inflation, it would have to go sharply higher and it would have to stay there for a long time," said Jim Weiss, deputy chief investment officer for stocks at State

Street Research and Management Co. in Boston.

Part of Wall Street's sanguine response to the rise in oil prices comes from the fact that oil languished at drastically low prices in 1998 and early 1999, prompting oil exporters to cut back significantly on production levels.

As a result, crude oil has gone from \$10.72 a barrel on Dec. 10, 1998, to a nine-year high of \$32.15 during trading

Thursday on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

On Friday, the price slipped back to \$31.51 a barrel.

Heating oil prices have doubled in some areas of the northeastern United States this winter, and U.S. gasoline prices have neared an average of \$1.50 a gallon, an all-time high.

"That's the human factor, and it's causing some discomfort," Weiss said.