

***Wesel resident loves his job as a chemist***

## Why Alexander Jezierski is Still Working at the Age of 72

**Series | *Wesel*** – In times when there is a shortage of skilled workers, many employers do not want to – and cannot – do without the experience of employees over 60. Wesel-based BYK-Chemie is an example. Alexander Jezierski, the company’s oldest employee, is over 70 and is currently in the U.S. on business. Why he remains professionally active.



“These are all my babies”: Alexander Jezierski is proud of everything he has helped build at BYK-Chemie in Wesel. Photo: ALTANA

By **Klaus Nikolei**, Editor

Shortly before Christmas, German labor minister Hubertus Heil made headlines across the country. The fact that many companies in Germany no longer want to hire people over 60 at a time when there is a dearth of skilled workers is an attitude “that we can no longer afford to have,” Heil was quoted as saying in a report in *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper. He points out that older employees have experience and expertise, which is often worth more than the speed that is often demanded. And that thorough work leads to fewer mistakes. Hubertus Heil hopes that more employers will realize this and give older employees a chance on the job market.

One company that undoubtedly appreciates the qualities of older workers and is thus certainly acting in line with the desires of the labor minister is Wesel-based BYK-Chemie (see [Infobox](#)). The company belongs to ALTANA AG. The specialty

chemicals group, which is also headquartered in Wesel, is owned by Susanne Klatten. Klatten, who is now 60, has for years been regarded as Germany's wealthiest woman and has made a name for herself as an entrepreneur who invests in innovative projects.

Of the 1,154 BYK and ALTANA employees currently working in Wesel, 75 are over 60. One of them is even over 70. To be precise, Alexander Jezierski is now 72 years old. Anyone who meets the PhD chemist can hardly believe that the amiable and extremely agile gentleman was born in 1950. "Yes, it's really true: I'm 72 and have spent exactly half of my life at BYK. And I still love my work," he says and smiles. But he can seldom be found on the company's premises on Abelstrasse in Wesel, where he was site manager for many years. This is because he is currently passing on his knowledge as a consultant to his colleagues at BYK in the United States. At the company's Wallingford site, not far from New York in the state of Connecticut, he is, he says with a wink, "employed as a know-it-all. There's no question that he takes great pleasure in this task, which he began in January 2018. "And it keeps you young." You can tell by looking at him.

The fact that many employees, including those in his circle of friends and acquaintances, are toying or have toyed with the idea of retiring as quickly as possible after the age of 60, is something Alexander Jezierski can't understand at all. "The best thing that can happen to you is to have a nice fulfilling job." And he shares this attitude with his wife, who also kept working well beyond the official retirement age. He feels sorry for those who have to drag themselves to work every day. "When people don't like their job, they usually don't enjoy life."

Alexander Jezierski comes from a Warsaw family. His father was a lawyer, and his mother worked as a teacher, among other things. Unsurprisingly, both of them continued to work for a few years after they retired. The young student was smitten by wanderlust at a young age. As it was virtually impossible to travel to the West from the East in the early 1970s, Alexander Jezierski decided to finish his chemistry studies in East Germany. Or more precisely, in Merseburg, where he wrote his doctoral thesis and met his future wife, who was working as a university secretary at the time. They married and had their first daughter. While his wife and child stayed in Merseburg, he returned to Warsaw, and the couple had a long-distance relationship. In 1985, their second daughter was born. In that same year, with a tourist visa, the now 35-year-old PhD chemist drove to West Germany in his Fiat Bambino, where he stayed with an aunt and her family in Kassel. He actually wanted to work for a firm in Rhineland-Palatinate. But since, Jezierski says, the company was worried he might be a spy, the whole thing came to naught. He had more success with an application in a trade journal. Among others, BYK-Chemie showed interest. "A friend from my days in Merseburg told me that BYK was a good company and that I should definitely have a look at it," says Alexander Jezierski. At the latest after what he refers to as an "impressive" conversation with then BYK boss Klaus Oehmichen, he had made up his mind: "I like it here, I want to start a new life here," he had said to himself. A few days later, on July 1, 1986, he had his first day of work on Abelstrasse. "Thinking back on it, all I can say is that I was born here a second time. I was really lucky and got to experience a

wonderful company culture here.” At BYK, he said, he was able to work the way he had always dreamed of working. “I was raised by my parents in the spirit of Christian Western values. It was so liberating for me to be able to say and do what I thought was right. That kind of corporate culture is a key pillar of success. It’s my kind of company.”

By which he means BYK as a whole and not just BYK in Wesel. He has held a total of seven positions in the company, including several years as head of the Technical Planning and Development department in Wesel, where he came up with a concept for the expansion of production. He is proud of the fact that he was the one who planned almost all the buildings that have been constructed over the years between the railroad line and Abelstrasse. “They’re my babies,” he says with a laugh.

In addition, he was site manager at the BYK plant in Kempen near Krefeld from 2007 to 2016. He was actually planning to retire at the age of 66, but then he got an offer to work at a chemical plant acquired by BYK in 2013 in Schkopau in Saxony-Anhalt for a year as a “know-it-all.” Among other things, he helped optimize production processes at that time. After twelve months there, he was asked to return to Kempen for a year on a transitional basis, which he was happy to do.

When Alexander Jezierski subsequently learned there was a vacancy at BYK in the United States, he accepted that challenge as well. “I didn’t speak English at the time, but I knew I could learn it.” At BYK in Wallingford, he initially assisted the new plant manager during his induction and then, after consulting with his wife, said “yes” again when they asked him to renew his contract for another year. He has now been in the U.S. for more than five years and recently extended his contract for another two years. But at 74, he says, he really wants to call it quits. And then? “If my health permits, I will start working as a ski instructor in Austria during the winter months.” Though he says this with a mischievous smile, he means it. For he is not only a recognized chemist with leadership qualities, but also an excellent skier. He’s been skiing since he was a student in Poland. “If I had practiced this sport at a competitive level as a child, I certainly would have gone far in skiing,” Alexander Jezierski is convinced. Incidentally, he has been a member of the Wesel Ski Club for many years and goes with work colleagues to the mini-ski area in Wallingford, a ten-minute drive from the company’s premises, every chance he gets. In March, he plans to fulfill a childhood dream and travel to the Rocky Mountains with BYK employees to go skiing.

A short time after talking to our editorial team at ALTANA’s headquarters in Wesel, Alexander Jezierski flew back to New York to do what he loves most – besides skiing – at BYK in Wallingford: to pass on his knowledge and experience to the younger generation.

### **Info**

World market leader for coating additives

### **No bubble formation**

Wesel-based BYK-Chemie, the largest subsidiary of the specialty chemicals group ALTANA AG, which is also based in the city, is by its own account the world market leader in the field of paint additives. Among other things, additives prevent bubble from forming during the processing of paints.

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