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Thompson came out of retirement to help tech startup grow

Pittsburgh Business Times - by [Beth Murtagh](#)

In 2003, the only thing keeping retiree Glenn Thompson in Pittsburgh was the "for sale" sign in his yard. Once the house sold, he and his wife, Linda, were headed to Greenwood, S.C., to spend their golden years at a lakeside home the couple had designed themselves.

He thought his last job, overseeing **PPG Industries Inc.**'s South American coatings operations in Brazil during the late 1990s, would remain the height of his career.

"I had had five years of an absolutely unbelievable life (in Brazil)," said Thompson, who spent about 20 years at PPG. "I wasn't sure how to top that anywhere else."

But then his name came up in a conversation between one of Thompson's PPG friends and a **Plextronics Inc.** employee.

Thompson met with Plextronics CEO Andy Hannah. After a four-and-a-half-hour breakfast, Thompson "was enthralled with the technology they were doing."

Several follow-up meetings later, he invested as an angel. Hannah subsequently asked him to advise on the use of their materials for the coatings industry.

"I didn't have anything to do. I was waiting for the house to sell, a couple days a week I would be down there," Thompson said. "One thing led to another. Andy said, 'You really need to come work for us.'"

It was supposed to be only a two-year commitment — just long enough to help the start-up get off of the ground.

Five years later, Thompson has helped grow the Harmarville manufacturer of organic solar cell technology to 61 employees as COO.

He and his wife sold their lakeside home and now live in Wexford, close to their parents, children and grandchildren.

His experience and age — Thompson said he has children older than about a quarter of the work force — make him a valuable asset to Plextronics, Hannah said.

"(Thompson has an) unbelievably stable personality for the company," Hannah said. "When you're growing a young company, you tend to hire relatively young, energetic people who are looking to change the world. What you need to do is mix into that people with experience who have seen the world turn over a couple times, and Glenn's seen a lot in his career. I like to think of Glenn as a stabilizing force for a fast-moving company."

Besides calling his time at Plextronics "truly a capstone in my life," Thompson said he sees his time as COO as a teaching opportunity, a way to give back after having a successful career.

Thompson's goal with Plextronics is to guide the company's organic electronic devices into commercialization. He likens his role as "being the father holding the backseat of the bicycle as the child learns to ride," ultimately letting go without the child noticing.

"That has to be the crowning moment," he said. "Walk away (and have people say,) 'Remember that guy Glenn who was here?'"

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