

Voices from the Floor

Special Aerospace Edition

August 2008

Special points of interests

- The next General Meeting will be on Saturday, September 27, 2008 at the New Westminster CAW Hall 326-12th Street at 9:30 am.

Editorial Policy: Letters and submissions are encouraged. The opinions expressed may not be those of either the Local or the National Union.

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New CAW contracts lead the way

By Brother Darcy Suehn

While much of North America suffers from the effects of the downturn in the US economy, two of the aerospace companies in BC, Viking Air and Cascade Aerospace, have seen growth.

While the booming resource sector is one factor, both Plant Chairs, Sister Jeannie Blaney of Viking Air and Brother Nate Shier of Cascade Aerospace, attributed a good part of the success of their companies to the new Collective Agreements they have signed. The members at both units pushed hard and made major improvements that both Sister Blaney and Brother Shier feel make it possible for their companies to attract and retain skilled trades people. After all, it's the skilled people who make all the difference.

Nonetheless, the big dark cloud on the horizon for the entire aerospace industry is, of course, increasing fuel costs, which are well outside of the



Brother Don Haug, Brother Gavin McGarrigle, Sister Jeannie Blaney, Brother Dave Ingram, Brother Gord Piper.

Photo provided by Brother McGarrigle

control of a collective agreement. In spite of rising fuel prices, Brother Shier noted that air travel capacity and maintenance are exceeding pre-9/11 levels. For CAW National Rep Brother Gavin McGarrigle, who led negotiations for both groups, the CAW is emerging as *the* Union when it comes to representing workers in this dynamic sector.

Viking Air

After 12 years and two rounds on the Bargaining Committee you could expect a certain amount of cynicism, but Sister Blaney does not come across as anything but upbeat about the future. Major improvements in wages and working conditions were made in this contract, the settlement of which came down to the last six minutes before the strike deadline.

Much of the battle at Viking was about improving contract language around Health and Safety, as Brother Gord Piper, the Local Rep and WCB/OH&S Rep for Local 114, could attest to. In the extended bargaining Viking added 55 new pages to their agreement and many of them dealt with Health and Safety. Sister Blaney viewed the involvement of the Skilled Trades Council as central to this ongoing struggle.

Prior to meeting with National Rep Brother McGarrigle to begin this round of bargaining, the Committee met on its own and developed the strategy they wanted to adopt. The level of commitment and shop floor involvement contributed highly to the success at Viking Air. Brother Piper commented after the ratification vote on how happy the members were and how their unity had made all of the achievements possible.

When asked about the future prospects with Viking Air, Sister Blaney and Brothers McGarrigle and Piper all remain optimistic, since Viking is to build De Havilland's famed Twin Otter, as well as other De Havilland aircraft which share a long and storied history, and which will help to build on the members' sense of accomplishment in their bargaining unit.

Cascade Aerospace

Of the two groups, it was Cascade that came closest to a strike. The port-a-potties were already delivered and Local Secretary Treasurer Brother Bill Gaucher had the trailer ordered and was in the process of getting it ready for delivery as word came through that a tentative agreement had been reached.

This was the second agreement for the Cascade group after being organized and there were some major improvements in this round. For Brother Harry Moon, the Local Rep, none was bigger than getting a full-time Plant Chair, which is a first for our Local. For a group of over 500, the addition of the Plant Chair, complete with an office, are a real improvement that will make it easier for the members to access the information they need.



Members at Cascade prepare for a strike that was narrowly averted.
Photo provided by Brother McGarrigle

Plant Chair Brother Nate Shier had trouble naming what he felt was the biggest gain but agreed with Brother Moon on the importance of the implementation of the full-time Plant Chair. For National Rep Brother McGarrigle, the addition of "real COLA" was a personal first for him, and also a first in terms of the general implementation of a COLA in any agreement in years.

In both of these groups it was the solidarity of both the membership and the entire Bargaining Committee that made these improvements possible. Both campaigns focused on Respect, Recognition and Rates, which resonated well with both groups, and in turn produced promising results for the present and future members.