

Persistence Pays Off for Pax River Workers



Bill Burke, Page One Photography

The winning crew at Pax River, the Navy's legendary aircraft maintenance and testing facility. Back row, from left, District 4 Business Representative Rick Compher, in-plant committee members Terry Kelly, Mariann Madden, Mark Duval, Cindy Wade, Alan Mathsen and Ryan Boyle. Front row, from left, James Wade, Chris Tibbs and Jim Scheufele.

When aircraft repair technicians employed by DynCorp Intl. at the Patuxent River Naval Air Station (Pax River) in Southern Maryland came up just 11 votes short of joining the IAM last year, the easy thing to do would have been to give up.

But the men and women who came so close to victory refused to quit. Like the famous test pilots whose aircraft they maintain, the Pax River workers regrouped, reassessed and went back to work. Just a year later, the same group of employees voted 377 to 283 for the IAM.

"Persistence pays off," said

in-plant organizing committee member Terry Kelly. "It's taken us a long time to get here, but we're about to find out how sweet the prize is."

As the *IAM Journal* went to press, the Pax River workers were in contract negotiations for better wages and benefits.

We Weren't Going Away

"The main issue with this group was simple. As non-union Service Contract Act employees, they hadn't seen a raise in years," said District 4 Business Representative Rick Compher, who led the organizing effort with Apprentice Organizer Jim Alexander.

"With housing and health-care costs climbing and wages staying stagnant, they were watching their standard of living slowly deteriorate."

"We were committed to this group for the long term," said District 4 Directing Business Representative Tony Provost. "We weren't going away." IAM organizers and the in-plant organizing committee had a big challenge – get information about union membership to co-workers spread out over a large rural area.

"We had to get the information to them at their convenience and in a way they felt comfortable," said organizing committee member Chris Tibbs. They created a website for employees to get information and discuss issues about the organizing drive, which helped overcome DynCorp's fierce anti-union campaign.

"The organizing committee could refute the company's claims instantaneously and use facts to prove their case," said Compher.

"This is a great win because no one ever gave up, not the workers at Patuxent River Naval Air Station or the IAM staff and organizers," said Eastern Territory GVP Lynn D. Tucker, Jr. "Now their persistence will pay off with a better life for Pax River workers and their families."