

Member to Member Effort

Organizing in Wichita



Photo by Randy Tobias

The Local 839 Organizing Committee at Spirit AeroSystems is one of several Wichita-area IAM local lodges that have successfully organized fellow members in Kansas, a Right-to-Work (for less) state. Meeting here are, from left, Kevin Jamis, Jeff Meis, Lester Adcock, Kathy Petersen, Susan Hiebert and Terry Rodriquez.

Organizing anywhere in the U.S. under Bush administration anti-labor laws is challenging, but especially in so-called “Right-to-Work” (RTW) states, or, more accurately, Right-to-Work-for-less states.

At Spirit AeroSystems, Cessna Aircraft, Hawker Beechcraft, Boeing IDS, York Industries and other aerospace companies in Wichita, KS where IAM members work along side non-union workers in open shops, in-plant organizing drives carried out by a diverse group of local lodge committees, officers and staff of District Lodge 70, the

Southern Territory, the Grand Lodge Organizing and Aerospace Departments brought in more than 2,600 new members.

“The talents used in negotiations and servicing dovetailed into organizing,” said Grand Lodge Representative and Organizer Don Barker, who heads up the ongoing campaign. “The teamwork demonstrated here is the primary reason for our success.”

One-on-One

“When workers don’t join the union, they’re giving management the opportunity to divide and conquer,” said Randy Dall, 14-year member of

Local 2799.

IAM members - sheet metal mechanics, machine operators, painters, inspectors, expeditors, assemblers, maintenance mechanics and others - have been reaching out to their co-workers telling them the advantages of joining the union. Whether it’s on the shop floor, at lunchtime meetings, or after work, it’s these one-on-one conversations that are at the heart of the campaign’s success.

“Today, these workplaces are more stable because the union is stronger,” said Headquarters General Vice President Rich Michalski. “It’s great to see the percentage of IAM members at each of these locations continue to rise. Our goal is 100 percent participation.”

As many people as possible are involved in all phases of the campaign, providing education and training along

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Local 839
Wichita, KS

the way. Prior to the start of the campaign, for instance, the Local 733 and 839 organizing committees attended the first-ever Internal Organizing class at the IAM's William W. Winpisinger Education and Technology Center. Students learned how to use the IAM's organizing software, develop a strategic plan and organize a campaign. The success of this inaugural class has opened the door for other local organizing committees.

Back in Wichita, the Organizing Department staff share what they've learned over the years through role-playing and other training, providing committee members with the communication techniques needed to succeed.

Aerospace Coordinator Ron Eldridge and District 70 Business Representatives augment that training by going over the intricacies of each shop with the respective committee. Local organizing committee members are then prepared to reach out to their fellow non-union workers.

"The more we engage the membership, the stronger we get and that strength increases our ability to negotiate better, stronger contracts for our members," said Southern Territory GVP Bob Martinez. "And that fact has encouraged workers, new and old, to sign up."

Long-time worker Tom Turner is one of those who

At Hawker Beechcraft, 70 percent of the more than 4,000 workers have joined the IAM, and that percentage is growing thanks to the efforts of the Local 733 Organizing Committee. Shown here, from left, Sam Humble, Kelly Cleaton and Derrick Davis. Other members not in photo are Tim Franta, Craig Dutton, Shaun Junkins, Linda Callen and Dane Dunnavent.

recently joined Local 839. "I found out first hand how important it is to be represented," said Turner. "My union settled a grievance and we received the benefits owed us."

Building Solidarity

Other benefits from the camaraderie developed during the campaign have spilled over into areas outside of organizing. More members are getting involved in local lodge committees, newsletters have start-



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ed and programs to help the community initiated.

"The enthusiasm of our members has been contagious," said District 70 President and Directing Business Representative Steve Rooney. "Many thanks for a fantastic job to the stewards, the plant chairs, the Grand Lodge Organizing reps and all who've been involved."



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The Local 774 Organizing Committee has been reaching out to their co-workers at Cessna Aircraft telling them the advantages of joining the union, and the workers are signing up. Clockwise from left are Shane Joynt, Dave Philpott, Andre Triplett, Tony Shultz, Ray Nuckolls, Martin Eddy, Kathy Lubbers, Steve Elder, Jacquie Sazama, Kit Williams, Rick Harvey and Danny Gutierrez.