

AEIF Members Choose IAM

The members and leaders of Armco Employees Independent Federation (AEIF) were no strangers to affiliation proposals during their union's 63-year history of representing steelworkers at AK Steel Corp. in Middletown, OH.

Over the past 15 years, the feisty independent union had turned back repeated attempts by the United Steelworkers of America (USW) and others to win over the AEIF, one of the few remaining independent steel unions in the United States.

But when the owners of AK Steel locked out 2,700 AEIF members on Feb. 28, 2006, after making contract

demands that included gutting the members' pension plan, the union's president and executive board quietly began to search for a partner that would protect their members and honor their union's proud history.

"It became very difficult financially to remain independent," said AEIF President Brian Daley, who endorsed an affiliation with the IAM and negotiated a transition pact that allowed current AEIF members to have their years of membership recognized by the Machinists and to waive all dues and fees until the lockout at AK Steel ended.

As Machinists, AEIF members would also have access to the IAM's \$157 million strike fund and would become partners with the AFL-CIO, a 63-union federation of 9 million union members across North America.

The IAM National

IAM members joined AEIF members outside AK Steel headquarters to protest the unfair lockout of AEIF members.

Pension Fund was a key factor for the AEIF leaders considering the IAM affiliation. While participation in the IAM Pension Fund would be contingent on negotiations with AK Steel, the prospect of providing members with a secure defined benefit plan, one that was not controlled by the company, proved to be a solid foundation on which to go forward.

"Pensions are under attack here in Middletown, just as they are everywhere else," said Daley. "The IAM Pension Plan would give our members a retirement they could count on."

With months of research behind them and a commitment from the IAM to preserve the traditions and legacy of the AEIF, the union's leaders went to the AEIF membership, and made the case for an affiliation with the IAM.

In just days, more than half of the AEIF membership signed cards calling for an affiliation with the IAM.

"Our goal was to bring the affiliation to the members for a vote as quickly as possible and then join forces at the bargaining





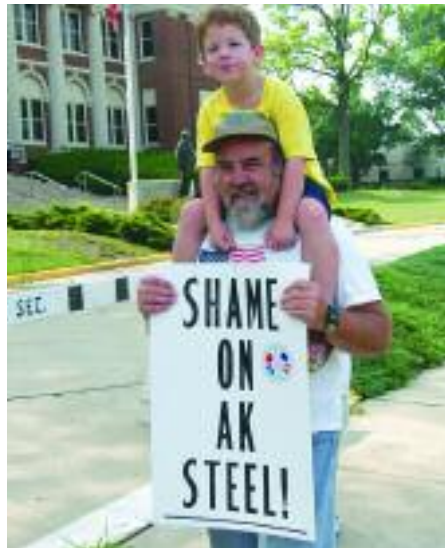
IAM President Tom Buffenbarger, left, addresses IAM and AEIF members at a Solidarity picnic prior to the election. Joining Buffenbarger on stage, from left, IAM Eastern Territory Vice President Lynn D. Tucker, Jr., AEIF President Brian Daley and IAM Eastern Territory Administrative Assistant Dale Hartford.

table to bring the lockout to a close,” said Eastern Territory Administrative Assistant Dale Hartford, who helped coordinate the affiliation effort. “The company wanted to replace the employees’ pension with an uncertain 401(k). The IAM pension plan would be the opportunity to break that logjam.”

About this time, the USW reappeared in Middletown and began yet another attempt to win control of the AEIF. Launching their campaign despite requests to withdraw, the USW filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to be included on any ballot that went before the AEIF members.

According to AEIF leaders and many union members walking picket lines outside

the Middletown Works, the USW campaign brought the negotiations to end the lockout to a standstill. “For more than two months, the company dragged their feet, waiting on the outcome of the election,” said Daley.



Determined AEIF members and their families, now with the help of the IAM, have stood up to unfair demands by AK Steel.

On July 27-28, in a nationally watched election supervised by the NLRB, the members of AEIF voted overwhelmingly for IAM representation and to go forward as AEIF-IAM Local 1943.

“The affiliation marks the end of one proud era and the beginning of another,” said Daley, who will continue as president of the newly chartered AEIF-IAM local lodge. “We may have reached a crossroads in the history of our union, but I believe we are moving forward in a way that respects our past and will lead to a more secure future for our members and their families.”

As this issue of the *IAM Journal* went to press, negotiations continued after a contract proposal by the company was rejected by AEIF-IAM members.