The financial skies over Cessna Aircraft Company, the world’s largest light aircraft manufacturer, were getting brighter. After surviving an industry-wide downturn after the September 11 attacks, Cessna was back to turning out aircraft at full speed.

The 5,700 members of Local 774, District 70, in Wichita, KS, who produce Cessna aircraft looked forward to a new contract that erased sacrifices they made when the company was struggling. They were determined to protect their current health care options and to preserve hard-won retirement benefits. Driving home the point, Local 774 members voted by an overwhelming 99.3 percent to authorize a strike if the company proposed an unsatisfactory agreement.

On September 8, less than a week before the contract expired, the Negotiating Committee reported that the parties were “miles apart.” The prospect of a crippling strike drew nearer each day. Over the next two days, the company submitted proposals that were more appropriate to a company on the ropes, rather than one with a backlog of orders.

On September 11, Local 774 called for an old-fashioned rally and filled downtown Wichita with thousands of Cessna workers. “They rocked the city,” said Aerospace Coordinator Ron Eldridge. “The strong, united voice of a very determined membership was heard loud and clear.”

### New Proposals

Within hours of the rally, company representatives called the Negotiating Committee to schedule a meeting that night. Within 24 hours, new proposals were on the table.

Four days later, the members of Local 774 ratified a new three-year agreement that preserved their health care coverage without employees being forced into the company’s proposed high-deductible plan. The new agreement also provides annual wage increases of five percent, four percent and four percent, a $3,000 ratification bonus and a pension increase.

“On behalf of the Local 774 Negotiating Committee, I want to thank the membership for the support they showed at the rally and throughout these negotiations,” said District 70 President Steve Rooney.
Fighting a Battle on Two Fronts

After United Space Alliance (USA) proposed a substandard contract offer last June, Joe Tidwell and his fellow members of Local 2061 and District 166 in Cocoa, FL, put down their tools, climbed down from their cranes and walked off the job.

Tidwell has been walking the line like most everyone else. Unlike most everyone else, however, Tidwell is also battling for his life. Fighting prostate cancer since 1992, and diagnosed with colon cancer in 2004, Tidwell is undergoing chemotherapy treatments, but he still walks the picket line.

Tidwell’s forty-year career with NASA goes back to the Apollo program where he was a swing-arm mechanic. Since then, he’s worked for TWA, Bendix, Boeing Services International, Lockheed and now USA, the launch service joint venture formed by Lockheed Martin and the Boeing Company.

Stick Together

When the strike at USA was evident, Local 2061 President Lew Jamieson offered Tidwell alternative strike duty because of his illness. But Tidwell wouldn’t hear of it. “After forty years and six strikes, it’s not in me to cross a picket line or not serve picket duty,” said Tidwell. “I want to support and encourage the rest of the folks. I want to tell them companies come and companies go, and no matter the outcome, we stick together because all we got is each other.”

“Every time we see Joe out on the line,” said Jamieson, “it makes us proud to be a Machinist and proud to be his brother.”

As the IAM Journal went to press, the strike at USA continued. Key issues include job security and retirement concerns as NASA transitions from the Space Shuttle to the Aries/Orion program.

“Joe Tidwell and his fellow members are making a stand to win a contract that protects their jobs, their families and their retirements,” said Southern Territory GVP Bob Martinez. “Shoulder to shoulder, they’re standing together and setting an example that will endure for years.”