

# Pulp truth

Issue 40 • October 26, 2011



**Please copy Pulp Truth front and back and distribute it during non-work time using your Communications and Action Teams, steward system or Rapid Response network. Be sure to leave copies in lunchrooms, break rooms, etc. We want to hear what's happening in your workplace. Send your news to [lbaker@usw.org](mailto:lbaker@usw.org)**

## Union Solidarity Trumps Huhtamaki Contract Concessions

Union solidarity both within the U.S. and internationally enabled Local 4-54, which represents the Huhtamaki packaging plant in Fulton, NY, to successfully push back against contract concessions to obtain a new three-year agreement with the company.

Huhtamaki originally proposed to replace the HMO health care plan with a high deductible health insurance plan that literally threatened the livelihood of the workers if they got sick. It was the worst plan USW Paper Sector negotiators have seen put on the table in the industry. It would have had such high deductibles before the insurance kicked in that the company offered the employees additional insurance they could buy to cover the deductible.

The company also wanted to change how overtime pay was calculated.

Local 4-54 brought Huhtamaki's proposal to a vote and the membership turned them down.

"We made sure there was an overwhelming "no" vote to show the company our members did not accept what they were trying to do," said Local 4-54 President Al Smith.

To show solidarity, Local 4-54 bought 500 t-shirts and all the members wore them on t-shirt days, Smith said. He said there was also 100 percent participation for blue hairnet days. Hairnets are required to be worn in the Fulton plant, so instead of wearing the white ones provided by the company the local bought 1,000 blue ones. The local sent 500 blue hairnets to Huhtamaki's Waterville, Maine, facility and all the members there wore them on the blue hairnet days.

The Huhtamaki Union Council met Sept. 28-30 in Pittsburgh and this showed the company that Local 4-54's contract fight was the same at all the bargaining tables, Smith said.

He said the USW International union helped his local connect with the Finnish union, Paperiliitto, and the Australian union, Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), which put pressure on the Finnish company. Paperiliitto and CFMEU told Huhtamaki that it was treating its US workers unfairly in regards to health care.

The International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM) played an integral role in connecting the USW with Paperiliitto and CFMEU.

Pressure from these three international unions was critical in getting Huhtamaki to drop its unreasonable demands and bargain fairly.

Smith wrote a blog on the USW website detailing the problems with the company's proposal. His local also did a petition and sent it to the plant manager and North American Huhtamaki CEO.

Smith said the International helped his local union find a local health insurance administrator, POMCO, that could save the company \$500,000 a year by taking over management of the Fulton plant's current HMO plan from a company-wide administrator. Huhtamaki approved the administrative change, and now the workers can keep their HMO and are guaranteed no premium increases for 2012.

"Our solidarity was what got us the contract," Smith said. "We bargained hard and we bargained smart with assistance from the International. We just kept at them. They eventually saw that if they did not move, there would be a work stoppage."

Besides maintaining the health insurance and pension benefits, Local 4-54 obtained pay increases for the second and third years of the contract. The union also got the company to back off its proposal to eliminate overtime pay on weekends and after eight hours of work in a day.

"The Steelworkers and the Council of Huhtamaki locals and the International labor community were overwhelmingly behind us," Smith said. "We couldn't be anymore grateful. We're proud to be steelworkers."

## Great Northern Paper is Resurrected

When Brookfield Asset Management shut down its mill in East Millinocket, Maine last April, it was the first time in a century the Katahdin region did not have a paper mill running. The Millinocket mill had been closed since September 2008.

Speculation about whether the region would ever produce paper again ended in mid-September when Cate Street Capital of Portsmouth, N.H., purchased in escrow the East Millinocket and Millinocket mills. The sale was finalized the end of September.

The new Great Northern Paper (GNP) Co. LLC started producing virgin newsprint at the East Millinocket mill Oct. 17 with a work force of 215 papermakers. The company might add another 50 to 75 workers as its recycling plant and other operations come online.

Company officials said market conditions would determine when the Millinocket mill restarts production of supercalendered paper. GNP is considering the production of torrefied wood chips at the mill. These charcoaled wood chips could replace some of the coal burned in electric plants and help reduce pollution at those sites. Cate Street also is building a \$275 million biomass boiler in Berlin, N.H., that will provide work for loggers, chippers and foresters.