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News Bytes

Women's Conference Set for September

Union women from around the world will meet in Toronto, Ontario on Sept. 23-26 at the Sheraton Centre Toronto. The Conference theme is "Women of Steel: Building Power-Taking Action." The conference registration deadline is Aug. 29. We expect the turnout to be even larger than the previous conferences. For information and registration, go to www.usw.org/womenofsteel.

Sweet Outcome

As if nothing at all had happened, as if a private equity company hadn't swooped in and taken over the FiberMark converter plant in Lowville, N.Y. and arbitrarily slashed benefits, as if the average steelworker there still hadn't lost about \$5 in take home pay because of the cuts, the plant manager invited all the workers to come on down to the annual summer trade show.

He propositioned workers on the 11 to 7 shift first — shut down an hour early and get free ice cream in the show tent outside. All 30 workers knew that if they ate ice cream provided by the company that had made their health insurance unaffordable, it would make them really sick. So they stayed at their machines.

That embarrassed the manager because no one showed for the sales shows. So he ordered the next shift to attend. That put Local 1988 President Roger Turck in an awkward position. He certainly didn't want to violate a company directive, but he didn't want his union brothers to gag on company ice cream either. So he ordered popsicles delivered to the plant and handed one to each worker on the way to the tent.

The sales people might have been a little intimidated by the line of workers enjoying their own treats and declining ice cream offered by the company. The planned hour-long show was over in 10 minutes.

"What we did to them isn't anything like what they did to us," Turck said. "They stole our wages and benefits but not our will to fight."

Local 1988 is not just winning the fight symbolically. The local learned shortly after the popsicle showdown that the NLRB agreed to hear their case against the company.

Kelloggs Contract Ratified

Steelworkers who make Nutri-Grain Bars and Pop-Tarts in Pike County, Ky., for Kelloggs ratified a new agreement that provides for improvements in most contract areas.

The agreement ratified July 17 by members of Local 9345 included a \$500 signing bonus, \$2.50 in pay increases over four years, a \$5 increase in the defined benefit pension multiplier, and a freeze of out-of-pocket health care costs.

This is the first time that an agreement with this employer was ratified on the first vote. Kelloggs bought the plant, which employs about 600 people, in 1996.

Steelworkers staff the 2007 America@Work AFL-CIO Union Industries Show at the Duke Energy Convention Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. The show is an annual expo of products and services produced by union workers. Here, volunteers take a short break in between handing out free products and holding several drawings for product assortments in the USW paper booth. From left, Vickie Brake, Samantha Herdt, Robert Atkins, Robert Odom, Calvin Welck, Sophia Welck, Carolyn Kirchner, Melissa Herdt and Corrinne Kirchner.

