

Making Gerdau Do The Right Thing

In the summer of 2005 Curtis Brottem, locked out of his job by Gerdau Ameristeel in Beaumont, Texas, fell and broke his back while working on the roof of his lake house.

Brottem, 50, was paralyzed from the waist down by the fall. But that wasn't his last injury. After the lockout ended, Gerdau terminated Brottem rather than put him on disability as company executives had promised.

Joey Duhon, a fellow Local 8586 member, was designated as permanently disabled during the lockout because he has Parkinson's disease. He found himself in the same position as Brottem.

Gerdau maintained they were not employees any longer when they could not report to work following the six-month lockout, which ended in December, 2005.

The local union helped Brottem and Duhon with COBRA insurance and, with support from the International, refused to settle a contract with Gerdau



Photo by Mark M. Hancock/The Beaumont Enterprise

until the company secured their future. It was basically a two-year holdout.

"The local stood behind myself and Joey until we received compensation. They were there for us," said a grateful Brottem. "Some people think the company did something for me, but really my support was from the union and the union members, not the company. I want to make sure people understand that."

In the end, the USW convinced the company to grant both a disability pension for all of their years of service at the mill, not just the few years since Gerdau purchased the mill. They were

also enrolled in a VEBA trust fund for medical benefits.

The union's intervention meant a lifetime annuity of \$1,120 a month each instead of payments of \$40 a month each, with no offsets and a joint survivor option.

"The union did an exceptional job, above and beyond the call of duty," Duhon said. "The Lord moves in mighty ways and Curtis and I are the beneficiaries. I just hope other men who become disabled don't have to go through the waiting we did."

Shortly before a tornado hit his hometown of Greensburg, Kan., USW member Jason Butler heard sirens blare an alarm and hid with his family in a basement storm cellar.

While the tornado was swirling in darkness above them on May 4, the Butlers could hear the wrenching sounds of destruction and smell the wood of their house breaking apart.

When the winds stopped, with lightning as their only source of illumination, they discovered their home was completely destroyed, with the exception of the basement.

Greensburg itself was virtually wiped off the face of the earth. Hundreds of homes and businesses — an estimated 95 percent of the town's buildings — were flattened. At least 10 people died.

Large and powerful

The unusually large and powerful tornado, a brawny 1.7 miles in width, traveled for nearly 22 miles. It mowed down everything on Sycamore Street where Butler's home once stood.

"The whole center of town is just wiped out," said Butler, an employee of Panhandle Energy. "Pictures don't do it justice. If you were to drive through town, you'd think hundreds of thousands of people were dead, not just 10."

USW Local 348, an amalgamated local of 750 members led by

Call for Help

Tornado Wipes Out Kansas Town, Leaving Members and Retirees Homeless

Dennis Chaplin, has established a fund to help the members and retirees who lost their homes and possessions.

Two members — Butler and Bruce Raber — and 10 of our retirees who resided in Greensburg lost their homes and most, if not all, of their belongings as a result of the storm. The mother-in-law of another member was killed.

Helpful boost needed

"It is times like this that the extended Steelworker family rises to the occasion and helps those who need a boost so they can start to rebuild their lives," District 11 Director Bob Bratulich said in a letter supporting the relief fund.

To help, make checks payable to USW LU 348 Tornado Relief Fund and send to USW Local 348, P.O. Box 171052, Kansas City, KS 66117.

The Canadian Steelworkers Humanity Fund donated \$10,000 Canadian to the local union fund. The Steelworkers Charitable and Education Organization also made a donation.



AP Photo by Sandra J. Milburn

Photo courtesy The Daily Times/Weshope

Iron Man

USW Member Retires After Record 66 Years of Service

Major league baseball's iron man Cal Ripken had nothing on the USW's Clyde "Tiger" Tidwell.

Tidwell, 87, retired on May 16 from Alcoa's Tennessee Operations with a record 66 years of service. That made Tidwell the longest serving employee in the history of the company.

Was he also the longest active member of the USW? There are no records to confirm that, but it could be true since Tidwell's membership dates back to the 1940s.

The Steelworkers Organizing Committee (SWOC) was formed in 1936. The United Steelworkers of America was officially created on May 22, 1942 by delegates to a SWOC convention in Cleveland.

Tidwell joined Alcoa on May 16, 1941 at Alcoa, Tenn., and became a millwright apprentice in late 1942. Initially a member of the Aluminum Workers of America, he became a steelworker when the two unions merged on June 30, 1944.

Ripken's streak

By comparison, the great Cal Ripken played in 2,632 consecutive games for the Baltimore Orioles from May 30, 1982 to Sept. 20, 1998, when he voluntarily ended the streak. He was one of seven players in major league history with 3,000 hits (3,107) and 400 home runs (421).

In his 66 years at Alcoa, Tidwell's only break was a short leave of absence in 1944 to serve his country as a World War II paratrooper. He worked in a variety of jobs including overhead crane operator and mechanical crafts specialist

and was most recently a mechanic in the Rigid Packaging Division's Finishing Department.

"I installed sprinklers. I held rods for civil engineers. I was an overhead crane operator. I unloaded brick when they were building furnaces. I've even swept the floors," Tidwell told the local newspaper, *The Daily Times*.

Happy worker

"I wouldn't change one thing if I had to do it over. I guess you could just say I'm a happy worker."

Tidwell exercises every morning, walks regularly with his wife, Floy, and before he retired woke up at 3:45 a.m. every day. He's had a few health problems over the years including a broken hip and two heart-valve replacement surgeries.

"I never really made any plans to retire," he said. "But then they offered

this good retirement package. My age had a little to do with it — but it was mostly the package."

Safety improvements are among the most significant changes he has seen over his career, along with the growth of computers. And what was Tidwell's secret to employment longevity?

"Stay positive and don't have negative thoughts," he said.

Can you top Tidwell?

If you know someone with longer service than Clyde Tidwell, let us know by writing to the USW Communications Department, Five Gateway Center, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15222.