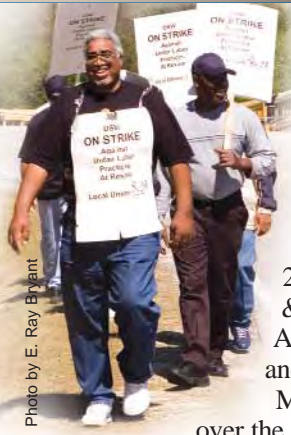


# Future Retirees Protected in Major Can Settlements

Photo by E. Ray Bryant



**H**ealth care benefits for future retirees were protected in new labor agreements that cover some 2,000 beverage can makers at Crown Cork & Seal, Rexam Beverage Can North America, Ball Metal Beverage Container and Silgan Containers. Many can companies have been bought out over the years by larger rivals and plants were shut down leaving the remaining companies with unfunded liabilities for approximately 10,000 retirees.

Rexam and Crown had moved in the federal courts to terminate retiree benefits with Rexam convincing a federal judge in Minnesota that it had the right to modify the programs. Retiree benefits at Silgan and Ball likewise were at risk.

"Our members stood up for those who came before them and because of their solidarity, we were able to maintain a secure retirement for those already on pension and for future retirees," said Fred Redmond, international vice president and lead negotiator with the can companies.

## Retiree litigation

Prior to the parties' beginning bargaining in February, the union and Rexam negotiated a resolution of existing litigation relating to the benefits of current retirees. Meanwhile, litigation with Crown Cork & Seal involving existing retirees continues.

The road to good contract settlements is not always smooth and the Rexam bargaining fit into that category. Management

came to the bargaining table pushing concessionary demands.

The highly profitable can maker, which had gained the ability to cut costs by convincing a federal judge to permit termination of retiree benefits, would not back off. With its factories running full force, the company gambled that the union would cave in and accept an inferior agreement.

Eighty percent of the workers at nine Rexam locations, voting by secret ballot, rejected the company's concessionary offer. A four-week strike followed. Rexam's CEO, headquartered in Europe, made a tour of the striking facilities and talked with many of the workers. Management got the message. The rank and file was sticking together. Scabs brought in to make cans were unable to fill orders with a quality product and Rexam sustained approximately \$30 million of losses during the strike.

## Master agreement expanded

Eventually, Rexam returned to the bargaining table with a different attitude and we were able to reach a fair and equitable settlement. The agreement allowed 175 USW members in Winston-Salem, N.C., to join a master agreement with 700 USW members at eight Rexam plants elsewhere in the United States.

New agreements with Crown, Ball and Silgan were settled without strikes. The USW membership at those companies made settlements possible by sharing the resolve of their brothers and sisters at Rexam.

Active employees won wage and pension increases in addition to preserving and protecting health care coverage for future retirees at all four companies.

## Local USW President Wins Dream Hunting Trip to Africa

# Escape to the Wild

**H**unting is a life-long passion for Kelly Bingham, president of USW Local 12-578 at the Holly Refinery in Woods Cross, Utah. So he was more than overwhelmed when he won a hunting trip to Africa.

"I had to fight back tears. It's really neat that something like this could happen to someone like me," Bingham said of the trip he won through *Escape to the Wild*, a television show sponsored by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, its trade union partners in the Union Sportsmen's Alliance and Versus Network.

The program honors hard-working union members with the hunting or fishing trip of a lifetime. And there is no doubt Bingham is hard working both on the job and in his community.

As a local union president, a program

coordinator for the Utah chapter of Farmers & Hunters Feeding the Hungry and a member of nine other hunting, fishing and conservation organizations, Bingham is dedicated to making a difference — especially for the next generation of union workers and sportsmen.

## Making a difference

"Everything that I have that comes from my job is because my union brothers and sisters stood up for what was right and made it better for my generation," he said.

Just prior to leaving for South Africa in May 2007, Bingham said he could hardly focus on anything else as he dreamed about hunting kudu and gemsbuck.

"I already have in my mind how I want them mounted," he said, adding

that he looked forward to seeing South Africa, experiencing its culture and sharing his story of union and community involvement.

Season two of *Escape to the Wild* begins in January 2008 on Versus Network. Tune in to watch your union brother as he stalks dangerous game on safari.



## Bridgestone/Firestone Members Ratify New Contracts

**U**SW members at eight Bridgestone-Firestone (BFS) plants have ratified new contracts that cover 5,200 members and fall in line with pattern agreements negotiated at BFGoodrich/Michelin and Goodyear.

The pacts provide for quality health care for active employees and retirees, pension improvements and capital investments in our workplaces.

"Quality health care coverage was maintained for active members and retirees alike, cost of living allowances were preserved and pension benefits were improved," said USW Executive Vice President Ron Hoover.

The master contract covers workers at four tire manufacturing sites in Akron, Ohio; Des Moines, Iowa; LaVergne, Tenn.; and Oklahoma City; a Firestone tube plant in Russellville, Ark.; and a Firestone air spring plant in Noblesville, Ind. Separate pacts were also approved for facilities at Warren County, Tenn., and Bloomington, Ill.

The three-year contract will run to July 18, 2009 and provide closure protection to the plants in Warren County and Des Moines plus \$100 million in investments. Current employees will receive wage-rate protection and the contracts guarantee job protection of at least 90 percent of established levels.

The master contract includes workers in Oklahoma City, where BFS halted tire production at the end of 2006. Provisions in the new deal include a \$23 million plant-closure package in addition to contractual benefits and life insurance coverage.

The USW's preservation of COLA — a benefit that was gained 30 years ago — played a large role in the ability of the union to protect retiree benefits. The active employees agreed to divert the first \$1 of a COLA to help defray retiree health care costs.

## USW Honors Dorgan, Michaud with Wellstone Award

**U.S.** Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-ND) and U.S. Rep. Michael H. Michaud (D-Maine) are this year's winners of the USW's Wellstone Award, which recognizes public servants who are committed to helping working people.

The award is named for the late Sen. Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, who throughout his career stood with the USW and working families everywhere.

Dorgan has taken the lead on an anti-sweatshop international trade bill supported by the USW. He also wrote the book "Take this Job and Ship It: How Corporate Greed & Political Deadbeats are Selling Out America."

## Steelworker elected to office

Michaud is a Steelworker who was employed at the Great Northern Paper Co. before being elected to Congress in 2002. He's leading the fight against free trade agreements with Peru, Columbia and Korea.

"You have no idea how much this means to me," Michaud said as he clutched the award during a dinner held at the Rapid Response conference. "I'm so proud of my roots. I'm proud to be here, proud to be a card-carrying union member."

Dorgan said he was deeply moved by the award, particularly because Wellstone was a close friend whom he missed. Wellstone, his wife, daughter and three campaign aides were killed in a 2002 plane crash.

"Working people build the middle class," Dorgan said during an acceptance speech in which he said too few politicians stand up for working people. "That's what expands opportunity in this country. Our job is to build the middle class."



Sen. Byron L. Dorgan



Rep. Michael H. Michaud with Leo W. Gerard



## PAC Award

**L**ee Gulley (center), a member of USW Local 602 in Malvern, Ark., displays a \$4,000 check he won as part of a contest connected to a PAC drive at his local. Also shown are Staff Rep. Don Davies (left) and Local 602 President Michael Martin.

Locals with PAC check-off language in their labor agreements can conduct a PAC drive along with a contest. Every member who signs up for a minimum of \$1 per week through payroll deductions receives a T-shirt and a ticket for a drawing. The International guarantees a prize to a winner from the local union. For more information, call PAC Coordinator Mike Scarver at 412-562-2342 or e-mail him at mscarver@usw.org.

## Wind Energy Workers Ratify New Contract

**S**ome 600 new USW members employed in Pennsylvania by the Spanish wind energy powerhouse Gamesa have ratified a new three-year agreement with pay raises, bonuses and benefit improvements.

Gamesa is the only wind turbine manufacturer that produces blades, towers and nacelles, the structures which house the generating components, in the United States.

"This agreement is a great example of how we can have good jobs and a clean environment," said International President Leo W. Gerard. "To think we can only have one or the other is a false choice. We can, and must, have both." USW members work at Gamesa sites in Ebensburg and Fairless Hills, Pa. The company has its U.S. headquarters in Philadelphia.