

# LL839 Machinists Matters



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## President's Corner

April 2011

By Kathy Petersen

### WHY DO WE STILL NEED UNIONS?

March 25, 2011, was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in New York City in which 146 workers died. All but 23 of these workers were women and young girls. Approximately half of the women were still in their teens, and two were only 14 years old. The fire started in a scrap fabric bin on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of the ten-story building.

The company's executive offices were located on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. An operator from the 8<sup>th</sup> floor called the executive offices when the fire was discovered, and all of the 10<sup>th</sup> floor occupants managed to escape by going to the roof and then over to an adjacent building. Somehow and for some reason nobody alerted the 300 workers on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor about the fire. Imagine this scenario: 300 people in a cramped room realizing that the building is on fire; two exit doors, one of which was locked; a flimsy fire escape that collapsed under the weight of people trying to escape; narrow stairwells that quickly became impassable; no sprinklers; no water for the water hose. There were two freight elevators, and those operators kept going up and getting people for as long as they could. The fire department quickly arrived, but their ladders only reached the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the building. Faced with the possibility of being burned alive, 54 people jumped from the 9<sup>th</sup> floor windows, 30 girls threw themselves down the elevator shaft, and 24 bodies were recovered amid the broken glass below the air shaft on the basement floor. All this happened quickly. In 30 minutes it was over, the fire having consumed all it could inside the building. Ironically, the building itself was fireproof, and it still stands today.

The company's two owners (Max Blanck and Isaac Harris) were put on trial for manslaughter but were acquitted because of "conflicting evidence." Two

years later, Blanck was fined \$20.00 for having the doors locked at another of his garment factories.

Why is this story so important? Because we need to remember the terrible working conditions in the factories at that time. The women at the Triangle factory worked 14-hour days for low wages, and their pay was docked not only for mistakes, but for the needles they used, and even for the electricity used. It is also important to remember that at this time industrial accidents (mine collapses, railroad and steel mill accidents) were responsible for at least 100 deaths each day. The owners at Triangle locked the doors in order to prevent theft by the workers.

In the two years leading up to the Triangle fire, a wave of protests had swept through the garment factories in New York. The "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand" refers to a general strike by young female workers in the shirtwaist industry – including those employed by the Triangle Shirtwaist Company. For 13 weeks the clothing companies used thugs and police to try to break the walkout. The strikers won support from organized labor and women's groups and garnered a partial victory. Union settlements were reached with about 300 companies for pay raises and improved working conditions. Triangle was not one of the 300 companies – they refused to let their workers become unionized.

The Triangle fire intensified union organizing efforts and forced politicians and the press to address the plight of factory workers. Frances Perkins was a young social worker who happened to be across the street when the Triangle fire broke out. She witnessed the workers jumping out of the windows to their deaths. The horror of that event stayed with her and she vowed to make that tragedy count for something. As a member of the Factory Investigating Commission, she helped push through dozens of workplace safety laws. Perkins later became the country's first female Cabinet member, serving under President Franklin Roosevelt as Secretary of Labor. She was instrumental in pushing through the Social Security Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act

*Presidents corner cont.*

(which established the first minimum wage and over-time laws), as well as helping establish laws against child labor. Decades later, OSHA was formed (in 1971) under the auspices of President Richard Nixon.

Prior to the Triangle fire, factory owners were complaining about having to install fire sprinklers. They claimed that if they were forced to put in sprinklers and fire escapes, then industry would leave New York and it would become a ghost town. Some owners claimed that an order to install sprinklers in warehouses amounted to a "confiscation of property." Three years after the Triangle fire, industrialists were again complaining about over regulation. James T. Hoyle, Secretary of the Manufacturers' Association, opposed the new safety laws, stating, "We have been legislated to death."

We are facing a similar moment today. Our legislators are echoing Hoyle, criticizing OSHA's impact on business. Rep. Tim Walberg (R-Mich.) led a hearing on OSHA and grumbled about "needless rules and onerous regulations." Slashing OSHA's budget would cripple an agency that has been effective at significantly reducing workplace injuries and deaths. But Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) has vowed to take a tough look at "regulations that impede job growth." Speaker John Boehner has said that "excessive regulation costs jobs" and the "path to prosperity" is to get government out of the way. Of course this is pure unadulterated bull excrement, but it seems like we have to keep relearning the lessons of the past.

It is unbelievable to me that some companies (BP and Massey Energy among others) choose to gamble with workers lives rather than adhere to safety rules and regulations. One reason they do so is that it is often cheaper to just pay the fines than to fix the problems. (Or not pay the fines and just let them mount up.) The lives lost in the Triangle fire, in the BP oil disaster, and at West Virginia's Upper Big Branch mine, are prime

examples of what can happen when employers refuse to work with unions to establish safe working conditions.

Let's face it; unions are under attack these days from multiple directions -- collective bargaining rights, the right to have a voluntary payroll deduction, the employee free choice act, and now workplace safety. We all know that politicians and big business are using the "excessive regulations" bit as an excuse to move jobs either overseas or to anti-union states. Where are our priorities as a country? Obviously not with the middle-class workers.

What we learned from the Triangle fire is that you have to have a set of rules and standards in place that protect workers. And since the primary focus of a corporation is on its bottom line, the government has to be in charge of enforcing safety regulations. I'd agree with Boehner that maybe we need to take a hard look at those rules and regulations. Where we'd disagree is that I think maybe those rules need stricter enforcement. If a company has numerous safety violations and is not making any attempt at corrective measures, maybe just slapping them with a fine is not harsh enough.

American workers today are benefiting from safety regulations that were enacted due to the Triangle fire. We must remember those 146 lives and what that tragedy did to wake up the country. Why do we still need unions? Because everything we have gained can be taken away -- politicians are trying to do just that right now.

Workplace safety should not be a partisan issue. Neither should collective bargaining rights or any of the multitudes of other workers' rights that are under attack. Let's not let those politicians who are in the pocket of big business take away everything that the unions have worked so hard and for so long to achieve! Stand together! We are One!

## **Something To Get Excited About**

By Jarrod Lehman

Great things are coming down the pipe very soon. Right now our Community Service Committee and the Recreation Committee is working together with the Company on a few joint events. By teaming up with the Company, we are keeping the "One Team One Spirit" alive and strong. In addition to building a stronger foundation to this partnership, we will be able to collect more donations for our charities ultimately helping our local community more than we ever have.

A couple things on which we are working is a Golf Tournament -coming up in June and there may even be a Car Show before the end of the year. These things take quite a bit of time and many resources to plan, so by partnering up with the Company we have opened up a treasure chest of resources that before were not made available.

Stay tuned to hear more, but get excited. Spirit is showing a strong commitment to partnering with the IAM, not just to benefit its members, but the communities we live in as well.

—Jarrod Lehman

The following article was written by sister Kathleen Butler. She submitted it to the Wichita Eagle's letter to the editor, and was published. We look forward to hearing more from Sister Butler in the future. Thank you again Sister, for allowing us to re-publish your article.  
—Jarrod Lehman

## Remember Women Who Died in Factory

By Kathleen Butler

Today Marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. As so many Americans decry unions and their "greed," they would do well to remember that those ladies worked nine-hour days for \$6 a week. A total of 146 people died that day, most by leaping out of fiery windows because there was no other way to escape the flames. That awful day sparked the fledging union movement that eventually benefited every working-man and woman in America.

In the third quarter of 2010, U.S. corporate profits hit an all-time high of \$1.65 trillion. Many companies have overseas factories where the average wage is \$250 a month, where they work elbow to elbow, where restroom breaks are timed, and where there are few or no environmental regulations.

Americans aren't leaping out of buildings, but they are leaping out of good-paying jobs into low-paying ones. And ridiculously profitable corporations and their supporters will not wake up to the fact that they are destroying what's left of America until they and their families find their own lives are on fire with no way to escape the flames.

## Business Rep Report from District 70

Hello Brothers and Sisters,

We hope this month finds everyone well and safe. We have all been quite busy this past month. We are continuing to work the issues as they come to us. The MO-8B issues have been referred to the Jobs Committee. Everything will stay as it is, pending the Jobs Committee's action. We would like to thank everyone for their patience on this matter.

If you have any questions just call the District at 522-1591. Remember we must stay strong!

Your Reps - Michael Burleigh, Mark Love, Becky Ledbetter, Steve Groom

## 'Twas a Lucky Day Indeed!

By Stan Chapman



The winner of the St Patrick's Basket is Scott Steiner. Congratulations to Brother Steiner for having the winning ticket! Brother Steiner is a shop steward in Plant 2 on 1<sup>st</sup> shift.

The basket contained many items relating to a fun St Patrick's Day such as an Ireland T-shirt, a Darby O'Gill and the Little People DVD, an "Irish Beer Drinking Favorites" CD, 1 Beer Pong game set and yes, a box of "magically delicious" Lucky Charms cereal! The basket contained many more Irish themed items and was valued at over \$70.00. The Community Service Committee would like to thank the membership for the support you give to us when you purchase food from the kitchen and tickets for the basket drawings. The money you spend enables us to procure additional items for baskets and raffles and allows us to help our members in need. We draw for the baskets at the end of the Local Lodge meeting and a picture is taken to put in the newsletter. Please try and attend

your monthly meetings and maybe you will be the lucky winner next time! Our next basket drawing will be in April. We also are planning a special Mother's Day drawing on May 14th at our membership meeting. That drawing will be for a Westinghouse 42" Flat Screen LED HDTV. See a Community Service Committee member to purchase tickets or stop by the Local. *Drawing will be held May 14, 2011. You need not be present to Win. Proceeds will go to the LL839 Community Service Committee.* Requested donation \$1.00 per ticket or 6 tickets for \$5.00.

### New Members for March 2011

Juan Anaya  
 Joseph B. Brabec  
 Edward C. Broyles, Jr.  
 Katha Hebb  
 Shawn Lashay  
 Nathan McCann  
 Curtis Newman  
 Urbano Rivera

Robert J. Ball  
 Brandon W. Brooks  
 Daniel Dodson  
 Andrew Jenkins  
 Jennifer L. Lewis  
 Maria Methman  
 Christopher Paul  
 Billy C. Powell, Jr.  
 Gregory M. Watkins

Rochelle Black  
 Samuel D. Brown  
 Greg Graner  
 Shelby J. King  
 Dennis D. Martin  
 Cole Mills  
 James A. Porter  
 Patrick D. Ruffin

#### International Association of Machinists

and Aerospace Workers

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Jobs • Security • Prosperity

*The Fighting Machinists*

[www.ll839.org](http://www.ll839.org)



Monthly Union Meetings

2nd Saturday of the Month

Executive Board meets at 8:00 AM

Regular Meeting at 10:00 AM

President -Kathy Petersen

Vice President - Brent Allen

Recording Secretary - Larry Stafford

Treasurer - Joni Pierce

Conductor/Sentinel - Jeff Meis

Trustees - Susan Hiebert, Stan Chapman &

Christopher S. Phillips

Communicator - Dennis Williams

Educator - Roger Stamback

1st Shift In-Plant Rep. - David Eagle

2nd Shift In-Plant Rep. - Howard "HoJo" Johnson

Editor - Jarrod Lehman

We are the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. We belong to Local Lodge 839 of District 70 in Wichita Kansas. We represent the Fighting Machinists of Spirit AeroSystems. We work to give our members a voice on the job.

Visit our website often at [www.ll839.org](http://www.ll839.org) for helpful and timely information.

If you have any questions, contact one of your In-Plant Representatives at 524-1090.

If you have any articles you want published, e-mail the Editor at [jlehman@ll839.org](mailto:jlehman@ll839.org).

The opinions expressed in any articles are the opinions of that author not the representatives of LL839

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