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NEWS >>

CHICAGO TEAMSTERS AT FLEISCHMANN'S MAKE VINEGAR FOR THE WORLD

Newest Members of Local 727 Keep the Faith in Union Movement

Vinegar is Bob Maza's unofficial family business.

Maza followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps as an operator at Fleischmann's Vinegar Co., beginning at 17.

"My dad got me the job. I started there right out of high school in 1972, and I've been there ever since," said Maza, a Teamsters Local 727 steward. "My dad also was an operator, and our schedule was such that we would relieve each other on shifts. We had a good system going."

Forty-two years later, Bob Maza is still going strong as a Fleischmann's operator.

The production facility at 4801 S. Oakley St. in Chicago's Canaryville neighborhood was built in 1910 and has undergone massive expansion over the last 100 years.

Approximately 76,000 gallons of vinegar per day — or 28 million gallons per year — are produced at the Chicago facility, which accounts for about 60 percent of all vinegar in North America. Fleischmann's is the world's largest vinegar supplier.

Maza said production used to ebb-and-flow depending on the season, but not anymore.

"The demand is high year-round, and we are pretty much always running at full-capacity," he said. "We operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It never slows down."

After production, the vinegar is loaded into tankers and delivered across the country. Fleischmann's has its own line of vinegars, but the majority goes to other manufacturers as a key ingredient used in pickling, salad dressings, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise and much more.

As an operator, Maza oversees tank transfers, monitors production and runs samples back and forth between the testing area, among many other things.

And even after 42 years on the job, Maza said there is never a dull moment.

"I love working here because it's not the same thing every day, there is always something different," he said. "I have to think on my feet and use my brain for a hundred different things every day. I also do a ton of walking around. Who needs exercise when you have a job like this?"

The 13 Teamster workers at Fleischmann's are among the more than 1,800 members who earlier this year transferred to Local 727 from Teamsters Local 710, which has been in trusteeship since July 2014.

"Even in such a short time, I've already seen how much Local 727 and our business agent have done for us," Maza said. "I'm very impressed. It has strengthened my faith in the union."