



TEAMSTERS JOINT COUNCIL 25

AFFILIATED WITH THE INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS

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NEWS >>

INTERLAKE-MECALUX WORKERS VOTE TO JOIN LOCAL 458M, GCC TEAMSTERS

The employees of the Pontiac Interlake-Mecalux plant just missed casting enough votes to unionize last year, losing 73-64. This year, the vote was similarly close — however, the result was inverted, leaving a 67-55 vote for unionization with Teamsters Local 458M for the employees of Interlake.

Rick Putnam, a local organizer with Local 458M in Carol Stream, Ill., was confident of the outcome in the early afternoon, well before the polls closed at on August 10.

“I don’t think it’s even a question of ‘if,’” he said. “A lot of workers here have come up to us, people who voted ‘no’ last time, and they’ll tell us they voted ‘no;’ a lot of them are wearing Teamsters stuff — they’ll have our shirts, hats, pins and stickers — they’ve got all that gear on, even with the major players from corporate, here. So they’re not afraid to show it...”

“As soon as we started signing (voting) cards, that’s when they started doing evaluations,” Putnam continued. “So, five days out from the election — five days ago — they started giving out raises. On Thursday, the company told the employees they would eat the cost of their insurance increase. But it’s not working for the guys, so it’s a little too little, too late...”

“Some of these guys that have been in there a long time making \$9.85 an hour; they could work at Walmart for more than that.”

The subject of safety and health concerns, which along with stagnant wages, were a driving issue for last year’s vote, also came up this time around. Putnam said conditions were “the same,” and that just the day before the election, one of the workers in the plant commented to him on how a stacker crane’s cable broke the night before, raising questions on commitments to maintenance.

He also said it was actually in the company’s best interest to keep up on maintenance because of its ties to businesses that trust the shelving made in the plant is stable.

“A vote to unionize means that these guys will have a voice,” Putnam said. “They’re tired of not being heard, they’re tired of reporting safety violations that won’t get fixed, they’re tired of telling the company what parts are needed and hearing ‘work with what you have.’”

“For example, when you’re welding, there’s a meter on there to tell you how hot the weld is. If that meter doesn’t work while you’re welding, they’ll want you to weld with it anyway. It doesn’t mean it won’t make a weld, but it could be a dangerous weld, because if it’s not hot enough, then the weld may not be good.

“These shelves they make go in Lowe’s, and Home Depot, and all over the world, and we go into those places all the time without thinking that there could be a bad weld on those shelves somewhere,” Putnam added.



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At the end of the workday, news of the final voting tally broke, with the Teamsters winning 67-55. At that time, Putnam said he looked forward to negotiating a contract for the employees so they would receive “dignity and respect.” Interlake representatives could not be reached for comment.

This story originally appeared in the Pontiac Daily Leader on August 10, 2016.