ArcelorMittal, Local News Stories Highlight Service of Iron Range Volunteer Firefighters

A very large fire on a hot summer day during the Fourth of July weekend brought attention to the important work USW Local 6115 member Casey Omersa does when he’s not on the job as a crusher planner at ArcelorMittal’s Minorca mine.

Omersa is a second-generation volunteer firefighter with the Gilbert Fire Department—one of more than a dozen departments dispatched to help battle a blazing house fire in Virginia, Minnesota, on Sunday, July 5, 2020.

The spectacle of the raging fire, which took close to eight hours to extinguish, caught the attention of an ArcelorMittal manager who lived in the neighborhood and recognized Omersa.

The company featured Omersa and other Minorca and Hibbing Taconite workers who were on the scene of the fire, including Jake Stachovich, Rob Zeiher, Ben Mancini and Tony House, in a story on its website.

Local news then picked up the story, highlighting the important roles Omersa and other USW members play in keeping our families and communities safe. We know their example will inspire others to serve their communities.

Let’s Hear from YOU! USW@Work is published four times a year and we need the submissions for the Winter 2021 issue by January 29, 2021. Please submit them to D11news@usw.org.

Also include a telephone number or active e-mail address in case we need additional information. We will try to include all submissions and we reserve the right to edit information in order to fit the allocated space.

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3M COTTAGE GROVE MEMBERS

Push Back Against Company’s Unsafe Proposals

More than 350 members of Local 11-418 began mobilizing in August, preparing to fight for a fair agreement and pushing back on management’s contract demands that would undermine health and safety and disrupt work/life balance.

“It is good to see the solidarity of our membership fighting back against these unreasonable company proposals which would negatively affect the health and safety of our members and the communities they live and work in,” said John Shinn, head of the USW’s chemical sector.

Bargaining started June 8 for a new agreement covering some 292 production workers and 70 in the building crafts. They work at the 3M Cottage Grove campus in Minnesota at six plants, each organized as a division with its own departments.

Members make everything from chemicals for other products to abrasives used in sanding pads and grinding wheels. They make glass bubbles for insulation and weight reduction for items like cars and planes, matting for catalytic converters, specialty films and tape.

Local 11-418’s contract expired Aug. 18 and is extended until Oct. 16, 2020. If an agreement is not reached by then, the contract will continue on 72-hour rolling extensions.

Local 11-418 Vice President Justin Recla said management proposes that the departments within a division be combined into one department so managers can move employees into different jobs at will. “This would be extremely unsafe, and 3M has no training in place to even try to accomplish this,” he said.

“All they talk about is flexibility. They said if we would agree to the proposal, they would ‘try’ to have training in place within two to three years. The ‘Run now, Train Later’ initiative is not an acceptable method,” Recla said.

With help from USW’s Strategic Campaigns department, the local formed a Communications Action Team, which is texting bargaining updates and information about rallies to members, handing out flyers about informational pickets and using social media to drive home the local’s message.

A billboard located near the 3M campus, Maplewood, also reinforces the local’s solidarity and need for a fair contract.

All these communication channels resulted in a good turnout of about 150 members for the local’s first informational picket.

“When the company sees that many people outside their gate, it sends a message that the ‘concession stand is closed,’” Recla said. “They are definitely feeling the heat.”
Elections have consequences, and President Donald Trump's National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has spent almost four years undermining workers to give management an upper hand.

Last year, the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) published a detailed report about how, under the Trump administration, the NLRB has systematically rolled back workers’ rights to form unions and engage in collective bargaining with their employers, to the detriment of workers, their communities and the economy.

In its October 2019 report, EPI recounts how the Trump board faithfully addressed each item on a top-ten corporate-interest wish list published by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in early 2017—taking action on ten out of ten items!

Now, even after the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the urgent need for stronger workplace protections, Trump’s NLRB ramps up a scorched-earth campaign aimed at annihilating organized labor and subjugating American workers.

The string of NLRB rulings amounts to death by a thousand cuts, each one chipping away at the long-established rights and practices enabling working people to join together to build better lives.

For example, the NLRB—run by Trump’s hand-picked corporate cronies—imposed additional, unnecessary steps to the union election procedure solely to drag out the process and give employers more time to thwart organizing efforts.

And the agency went further, empowering employers to begin withholding email addresses and other information unions need merely to contact prospective voters.

The board also ruled that employers may discipline a worker just for mentioning a union drive to a colleague during work hours.

In a decision rooted in spite, rather than logic, it concluded the mere reference to an organizing effort—even an offhand remark—constituted an illegal solicitation of a colleague’s vote.

The NLRB is supposed to be responsible for protecting workers’ rights. But under Trump, it’s stacking the deck in favor of greedy corporations desperate to silence workers’ voices and bust unions at any cost.

The Trump administration continually seeks new ways to rig the system against working people.

In one of its biggest gifts to corporations yet, the NLRB went to court to overturn an Oregon law that affords workers a degree of protection from the pernicious anti-union meetings that employers across the country regularly hold to belittle union supporters, lie about labor and kill organizing campaigns.

In Oregon, employers may hold anti-union meetings. But they cannot force workers to attend them. The NLRB filed suit to change that, arguing the law violates employers’ free-speech rights.

That’s right. The Trump administration wants to further free employers to lie, bully and fearmonger during organizing drives, even as it empowers the same companies to discipline workers for so much as mentioning a union.

Workers in every sector of the economy across the country realize that only by organizing can they win family-sustaining wages, decent benefits and safe working conditions.

However, building better lives for millions of ordinary Americans will require an NLRB committed to defend their right to organize and bargain collectively instead of restricting it further.

The president nominates NLRB members as well as the agency’s powerful general counsel, and the Senate confirms them. So only the election of federal officials committed to workers’ rights can truly put the agency back on course.

Trump and his Senate allies not only installed corporate lawyer Peter Robb as general counsel but put former GOP congressional staffer Marvin Kaplan and corporate lawyers John Ring and William Emanuel on the five-person board—appointments that deliberately set in motion the war on unions and workers.

In a recent letter, the USW urged senators to reject Trump’s renomination of Kaplan, whose term expired this summer, because of the unprecedented damage he helped inflict on American workers, who only want fair treatment on the job. The Senate voted to confirm him for another term anyway.

Our union is too familiar with the consequences of electing politicians who talk about looking out for American workers while turning a blind eye to the ways employers take advantage of a playing field unfairly tilted in favor of management.

Too many workers have already paid the price for the outcome of our last election.

The good news is that we are our own best hope to change the current direction and prevent the further erosion of our power at the bargaining table.
**Sister Paula K. Anderson** from USW Local 560 in North Dakota passed away tragically on Thursday, June 11, 2020, after an ATV accident.

Paula began her career at Bobcat on general assembly in 1995 and eventually became lead implementer on the day shift. Paula was an active union member, participating in Women of Steel and many other union activities.

Her most memorable activity was Christmas shopping for local families in need during the holiday season each year. She regularly helped organize benefits, fun runs and other community activities and also served as trustee on the executive board for USW Local 560.

The “Paula Anderson Memorial 4-Wheeler Run” was held on September 19, 2020 in Milnor, North Dakota. T-Shirts and Can Koozies were sold for the event, and all proceeds benefit the Hospice of Red River Valley.

“Paula is someone that you could always count on! If she said she would do something, you knew it would get done,” said Local 560 Women of Steel Chair Deb Carter. “She was someone I depended on a lot and she made everything look so easy. She is deeply missed for her quick wit, sarcasm, free spirit and big laugh.”